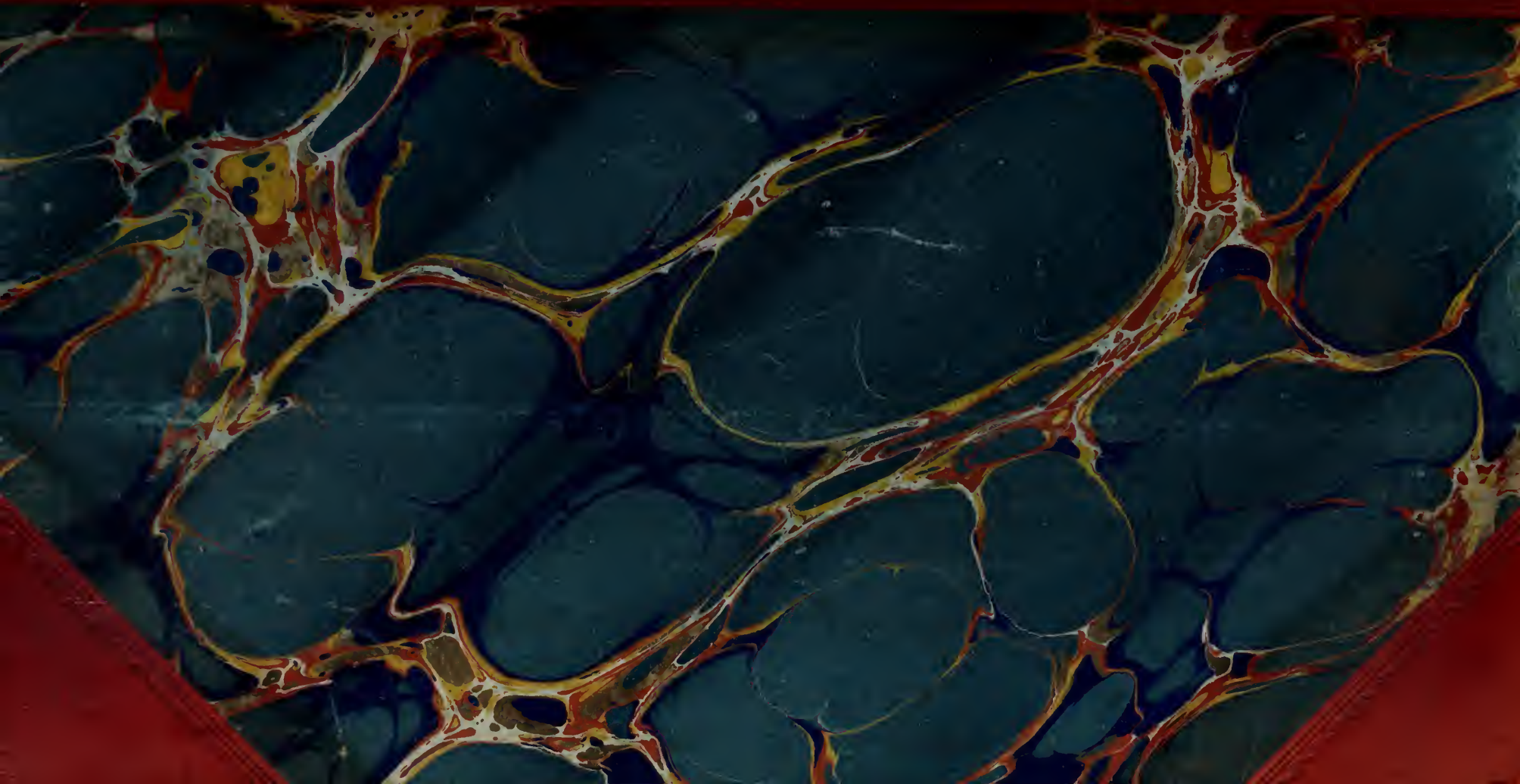
3 1761 08819855 1



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
University of Toronto

http://www.archive.org/details/argosythe56wood

PLAYING AND SINGING TO THE LITTLE ONES.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

CHARLES W. WOOD.

VOLUME LVI

July to December, 1893.

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,
8, NEW BURLINGTON STREET, LONDON, W.
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

All rights reserved.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

AP
4
A7
v.56

CONTENTS.

MR. WARRENNE: MEDICAL PRACTITIONER. With Illustrations by M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

		PAGE
Chap. XXIII.	Under Examination	1
XXIV.	In London	10
XXV.	Music and Jewels	14
XXVI.	Not Maud	89
XXVII.	Mr. Reynolds is Delighted	96
XXVIII.	Mr. Warrenne Consents	105
XXIX.	A Fit of Depression	107
XXX.	Love and Philosophy	177
XXXI.	Picking Cowslips	182
XXXII.	"Love Alters Not"	189
XXXIII.	"That Horrid Steamer!"	197
XXXIV.	The Stapylton Girls	265
XXXV.	Contradictions	272
XXXVI.	To Be or Not to Be?	281
XXXVII.	At the Ruins	353
XXXVIII.	Indicision	359
XXXIX.	The Ball	364
XL.	Love and Abuse	441
XLI.	Too Late	447
XLII.	Mrs. Creswick to the Rescue	455

THE STREGA'S CURSE. By LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE 58, 153, 222, 323, 405

Amongst the Missing . . . 118
Chance Meeting, A . . . 290
Child or Woman? . . . 81
Christmas Eve in the Chapel of Villa Cristina . . . 468
Civility. By the Author of "How to be Happy, Though Married" . 23
Cruel or Thoughtless? . . . 338
Dark Design, A . . . 527
Fiction Coach, The. By FAYR MADOC. . . . 29
Field of Isandhlwana, The. By LIEUT.-COLONEL MAHONY, C.M.G. 214
Friendship. By A. H. JAPP, LL.D. . . . 202
Haunted Ashchurch . . . 509
His Letter. By HILDA NEWMAN . . . 374
Ida Pfeffer. By ALICE KING . . . 255
Jusqu'au Revoir. By CHARLES W. WOOD . . . 478
Madame de Genlis. By ALICE KING . . . 429
Memphis and Sakkarah. By CHARLES W. WOOD . . . 381
Miss Anne. A Sketch. By KATHERINE CARR . . . 242
Mrs. Henry Wood and Worcestershire . . . 463
Of Moderation. By A. H. JAPP, LL.D.. . . . 169
Of Wise Boldness . . . 288
Pour Passer le Temps . . . 346
Pyramids of Egypt, The. By CHARLES W. WOOD . . . 129

PAGE
Pyramids "At Home," The. By CHARLES W. WOOD . . . 298
Seafarer's Home, A. By F. A. FULCHER 114
Silver Thimbles, The 259
St. Andrews. By ALICE MACDONALD 53
Three Cigarettes, The. By GEORGE FOSBERY 435
Ugly Man, The 516
Was it a Dream? 42
Weird Violin, The 522
Where the Plane-Trees Grow. By KATHLEEN WATSON. . . 205
Witch's Spell, The By ELLEN THORNYCROFT FOWLER. . . 170
Woman's Judgment, A 422

POETRY.

Sing Hey! For my Love. By HELEN MARION BURNSIDE . . 22
Will She Come? By C. E. MEETKERKE 80
Hope. By SYDNEY GREY 88
White Wings. By C. E. MEETKERKE 167
Parted. By E. NESBIT 169
Finis. By G. B. STUART 213
Love's Seasons. By CHRISTIAN BURKE 241
Gifts. By C. E. MEETKERKE 289
In the Days of our Youth. By CHRISTIAN BURKE. . . . 352
Penmon Cross. By MARION METEYARD 380
Seven Years 404
All Saints' Day. By CHRISTIAN BURKE 440
Night. A Sonnet 467
At Evensong. By SARAH DOUDNEY 521
An English Garden. By E. NESBIT 526
The Journey's End. By CHRISTIAN BURKE 568

ILLUSTRATIONS.

By M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

"'Pick up my roses, please, Grandfather.'"

"'She is extremely pretty,' said Sir Frederic; 'you do not in the least resemble her.'"

"'It is the heat," said Maud, looking carefully at the drawing. "You can finish it at home.'"

"There, in a small recess, with a curtain half-drawn before it, was the statue of Ruth, gleaning."

"Some day you will come to me and say, 'How much I like his dry ways!'"

Illustrations to "The Pyramids of Egypt," "The Pyramids 'At Home,'" "Memphis and Sakkarah," and "Jusqu'au Revoir."

"Jew when the last gold lingers in the west."

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1893.

MR. WARRENNE:

MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNDER EXAMINATION.

FLORENCE was very soon made aware of one peculiarity that her father possessed. He liked to know where everybody was and what they were doing. As soon as he found out, after breakfast, that Mrs. Reynolds was in the conservatory with Colonel Creswick, and the children learning to spell with Harley, he was then anxious to learn how Florence was employing her time. If he heard that she was sitting with Mrs. Creswick in her dressing-room, which was now often the case during the morning, he was contented; for he had a high respect for his sister, and concluded that something useful was going on wherever she presided. He had not as yet put in execution his plan of superintending her mental improvement. He was too much occupied in arranging his own affairs, and his frequent visits to London for this purpose, as well as for the purpose of engaging a house for the ensuing season, engrossed both his time and thoughts. But in order that she might not be totally unemployed, her father, having learned with some astonishment that she had never read 'Hallam's History of the Middle Ages,' purchased it for her, and recommended that she should make herself thoroughly acquainted with its contents, suggesting at the same time that the most efficacious method of reading works of that kind, was with a pencil and paper, to note down such facts as you may not have met with before, or such expressions of opinion as you think may require further consideration, or confirmation by other authors.

Florence stared a little at these admonitions, some of which had been slightly suggested to her by Mrs. Creswick, it need not be said,

in vain, accepted the books with as gracious a manner as if they had been a case of jewels, and took care to be seen with a volume in her hand once or twice after breakfast.

One morning Mr. Reynolds made his appearance in Mrs. Creswick's dressing-room, where his sister was writing, and Florence lounging in a chair, with 'Hallam' open on her lap; and taking a seat beside his daughter, he entered into conversation with her on the subject of her studies.

"This is a book of outlines, you perceive," he said, taking it up; "the most condensed account I am acquainted with, of a most important section of history."

Florence acquiesced, with her usual prepared smile.

"It is a book that would content no student of history," pursued her father; "but from its accuracy and method, it is admirably adapted to prepare the mind for a wider range of reading. For instance, in this chapter, the condition of Italy for many centuries is distinctly sketched. This prepares you to read the works of the great Italian historians with interest—Davila and Guicciardini."

Florence looked to her aunt as if imploring some assistance against this inundation of literature. But Mrs. Creswick was steadily writing and dotting, without raising her eyes from her paper.

"You are now," said her father, observing the portion of the first volume on which she appeared to be engaged—"you are now doubtless familiar with allodial and feudal tenures, with the origin of fiefs, and with the distinction between proper and improper feuds; and you perceive how very much of legal and social knowledge hangs upon a clear understanding of these important points."

Florence understood exactly as much of these things as she did before she opened the book; for although her eye had carelessly traversed the pages, she had been unceasingly occupied with musings upon her own altered lot, and she retained not one syllable that she had read.

"I cannot boast of much knowledge upon these points," she replied politely, but very coldly; "where there is a total want of interest on any subject, it is not easy to retain the author's remarks, and I confess that I feel no curiosity to explore the feudal system or the petty quarrels of the Italian Republics."

"It is to be regretted," returned her father, "not so much for the subjects in themselves, as because they form a large feature in the annals of literature."

Florence was silent.

Mrs. Creswick, having folded and sealed her letter, now looked up.

"Mrs. Reynolds begged me to ask Maud and her sister to come in this evening," she said. "Perhaps you and Florence would step over and give them my message!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Reynolds. "As we leave the Ferns so soon, I am glad Mrs. Reynolds will have the opportunity of passing an

evening with those very attractive young people. Florence, my dear get ready."

Florence retired, pale with anger at the idea of being commanded to do anything, or go anywhere. As she closed the door, Mr. Reynolds turned abruptly to his sister.

"She has no energy, no desire for improvement," he exclaimed. "Her life up to the present time has been a waste!"

"It has," replied Mrs. Creswick.

"A fortune expended, and nothing to show for it; not even the poor advantage of ornament, for Mrs. Reynolds tells me that she does not sing nearly so well as Miss Warrenne, who has never enjoyed half her opportunities."

"It is true," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Do not think I imply a shadow of reproach to you," said Mr. Reynolds; "I well know that her education was not committed to your hands—you had no power to compel her thoughts."

"None," returned his sister.

"But now, what is to be done?" he asked. "Will she learn?—will she consent to retrieve the negligence of past years?"

"I think not," said Mrs. Creswick; "she does not feel the value of knowledge, and she is too old to be compelled to acquire what is irksome. She is young, and she has a good deal of character, and I have a deep faith in the tuition of circumstances. It is one of the wonderful arrangements of Providence that every person's life, however smooth the outward current, is fraught with struggles which are meant to educate the soul. I speak of those persons who can think and feel, and who are not debased to the level of the brutes. Florence, I think, will never become a literary character, but if she becomes docile, affectionate and active, you will have but little to regret."

She did not look particularly docile when she returned to the room dressed to accompany her father. Mr. Reynolds, however, was not a person to trouble himself about the manner, provided the obedience was entire. He offered his daughter his arm, and they proceeded in silence to the Warrennes.

As they crossed the road they met Harley returning without the children. Maud had begged and obtained leave of Mrs. Reynolds to fetch over the little ones whenever she caught sight of them in the Laurel walk; and there were few pleasures they looked forward to so eagerly as an hour's play with Maud and her sister.

They found Alice playing on the seraphine, with little Edward standing beside her, his eyes riveted on her face. Captain Scudamore was seated near the instrument, and gazing on her with equal earnestness. A large cluster of violets that lay on the desk of the seraphine seemed to the experienced eye of Florence to say a great deal.

Lucy, nestled in the corner of the sofa, with her head resting on Maud's shoulder, was waving her hand slowly in time to the music.

There was a general move on the entrance of the visitors. Maud

came forward to receive them. Alice rose, and, for the first time in her life, felt embarrassed; she feared they would notice that Captain Scudamore was ready to lead her to a seat—that they would make a mistake, and fancy he was really paying her attention.

The children ran up to Mr. Reynolds, and Florence sank upon the sofa, haughty and silent.

"You are so kind to these little ones," said Mr. Reynolds, "that they are never happy away from you."

"They are so good," returned Maud. "We shall hardly know how to supply their place when they go to town."

"We shall be absent merely for one season," said Mr. Reynolds; "a country life, both in its duties and pleasures, suits me best. And when we settle, as I intend to do, in this neighbourhood, I hope Mrs. Reynolds may often enjoy the pleasure of your society."

Maud expressed her satisfaction in this prospect; and then turning to Florence, she attempted to exchange a few remarks with her, but with very little success, so chilling and gloomy was her manner.

"Papa!" said Edward, pointing up to Alice, who was talking in an undertone with Captain Scudamore; "she's blind!"

"Yes, my dear," replied Mr. Reynolds.

"But she has two eyes! Why can't she see?" asked the child.

"I do not know, my dear; but you must not ask—it is neither kind or polite."

"Papa!" he exclaimed, with that total forgetfulness of reproof that young children often exhibit; "we are to have a ride in Karl's barrow, presently."

"And Karl cannot speak English," said Lucy.

"I had rather have a ride on Dick's beautiful horse," said Edward. "I rode all round the courtyard yesterday; only Dick held me on. I should like to ride by myself."

Mr. Reynolds, not knowing who Dick was, this remark was passed without reproof.

"What, are you going?" asked Maud, as Captain Scudamore crossed the room to take leave of her. "I thought you would have helped to wheel the children in the barrow!"

"No, no! I overturned them into the hedge last time: I will have nothing to do with the barrow again," he replied.

"Oh! if you have so little enterprise as to be deterred by a single failure, I give you up. Tell Mr. Scudamore that we live in hopes of seeing him at dinner."

Florence, who felt deeply wronged that Captain Scudamore had not yet sought an opportunity of recommending himself to her notice, bowed, with the utmost coldness, as he left the room. She glanced bitterly from Maud to Alice, and from Alice to the nosegay of violets, wondering which of the sisters had robbed her of her meed of homage.

"I hope that Florence has been able to persuade you to pass the evening with us?" said Mr. Reynolds, addressing Maud.

"I have not yet had time to urge my aunt's request," said Florence coldly. "Mrs. Creswick hopes you may be disengaged to-night. We drink tea at eight."

Maud accepted at once. Alice, in a timid voice, reminded her that they were expecting Mr. Scudamore and his son to dinner.

"All the better," said Maud; "they will keep papa company, and he will not miss us, you know."

"We have nothing to offer at the Ferns, I am sure, that could compensate for the loss of Captain Scudamore's society!" said Florence, bitterly.

"Captain Scudamore would be the loser by our arrangement," remarked Mr. Reynolds. "Suppose, Miss Warrenne, you could prevail on him to escort you to the Ferns? Mr. Warrenne and Mr. Scudamore would then be left to enjoy each other's company."

Maud, with a laughing ease of manner, which showed that the matter was perfectly indifferent to her, readily undertook to answer for Captain Scudamore; and Mr. Reynolds and his daughter took their leave.

Captain Scudamore appeared perfectly resigned to his fate, when Maud told him, as they were standing round the fire before dinner, that he was to go with them to the Ferns in the evening. Mr. Warrenne, indeed, hinted to his daughter that she ought to have accepted for him conditionally; but Mr. Scudamore said that would have been perfectly unnecessary, for wherever Maud was, there, of course, Dick would prefer to be.

This gallant speech made Mr. Warrenne look rather grave. Maud merely laughed; and Captain Scudamore, who was leaning on the back of Alice's chair, said to her:

"I am very happy to go, I am sure. You will play there, just as if you were at home, will you not? I should regret to lose your playing this evening."

"If I am asked," said Alice, in a low voice.

"You are sure not to be asked if Miss Reynolds can avoid it, said Maud; "she likes to have all the playing in her own hands."

Mr. Scudamore laughed at Maud for this speech, and said she was jealous of Miss Reynolds, though, he observed to his son, there were very few people of whom Maud need be jealous.

Captain Scudamore assented to this polite speech of his father's with such an absent air as would have convinced a more clear-sighted person that his thoughts were very differently occupied; in fact, all the overtures that had hitherto been made to Maud, had been solely the work of Mr. Scudamore.

They found, on arriving at the Ferns, that, as usual, the Creswicks were not alone. Mr. and Mrs. Thomason and their daughter, who were going to see a relation at some distance from Erlsmede, took it in their way, in order that Ada might pay a flying visit to her godmother. Mrs. Creswick led Maud up to Ada, and introduced the

young people particularly to each other. Miss Thomason appeared much pleased at being made known to the sisters, and left her seat by the Colonel to join their party.

Mrs. Reynolds fell into conversation with Captain Scudamore, who, however, remained close to Alice; while Mr. Thomason and Mr. Reynolds, standing together on the hearth-rug, were discussing the political question of the hour.

Mrs. Thomason was accommodated with a large arm-chair, and her eternal knitting, over which she heaved her usual allowance of sighs.

"Now, my dear Ada, you must give me tidings of your cousin, Mr. Courtenay," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Charles?" said Ada, turning round; "he remained in town—it is a little papa's fault that he did not come with us—he only needed half a word of pressing, I am sure—for on my word, his souvenirs of Erlsmede are very animated!"

She turned towards Maud with a smile as she spoke, without guessing how very near she was to the mark.

"I told Charles there was a seat for him," said Mrs. Thomason, with a sigh. "I thought he would like the change; but he fancied he could not be spared from the business."

"He is the most considerate person I know!" said Ada, warmly. "I do not know how I shall learn to go without his cares—in little things I mean—which I must forego when he marries; his wife would not thank me for engrossing him as I do now."

"Is he——" Maud was going to make some inquiries, which a strange feeling of restraint seemed to check.

"Oh! you have no idea; he rides with me, drives mamma and me out, chooses my books, and very particular he is, I can assure you!—and gives me so much advice, that I fairly tell him I don't know what to do with it all! As a husband, he might be too exacting, but since I never mind what he says, I find him delightful as a cousin. How did you get on with him?" she added, turning to Florence.

"Do not fear that I shall interrupt his friendly attentions to you," said Florence; "to be candid with you, I find him a very unbending, impenetrable person."

"Ah! but then, my dear, the delight of forcing him to bend, of sending him on provoking little errands, of doing what you know he disapproves of for the mere pleasure of hearing his grave remonstrances, and laughing at them—in fact, of teasing him from morning till night! don't you agree with me?" said Ada, turning to Maud. "To enjoy all this in perfection, it is necessary that he should be a grave unbending person."

Maud, her sparkling eyes brimming with laughter, assented to Miss Thomason's remarks. She felt for the first time that there would be something very piquant in such a triumph.

"Come, Ada, don't make yourself out worse than you are," sighed

Mrs. Thomason; "Miss Warrenne will think you are in earnest; you do plague your cousin, and I often wonder at his patience, but you are not so bad as that!"

"You have a charming house in town, Mrs. Reynolds," said Mr. Thomason; "I knew it when my friend, Sir Ralph Masters, had it."

"I have not seen it, but I am sure it is perfect," said Mrs. Reynolds; "I mean to be delighted with it beforehand—Mr. Reynolds has so much taste."

Mr. Reynolds paused in a question he was addressing to Colonel Creswick, bowed gravely to the compliment, and then resumed his conversation.

"Don't you long to be in town again, dear Florence?" asked Ada in a whisper.

Florence shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! I didn't tell you before dinner, Lord Thomas Mortimer proposed for Miss Lockwood about a week ago—Lady Jane, who is her guardian, you know, absolutely refused him! Poor Miss Lockwood is breaking her heart about it. Do you think him handsome?"

"Very," replied Florence; "and so fascinating in his manners!"

"He is dreadfully in debt," said Ada.

"If Lady Jane was not a great screw," said Florence, "she would come forward handsomely, and put things to rights for them. It would be such a nice match for Caroline!"

"She has taken her down to Leamington instead," returned Ada, laughing; "that will cost her something."

"Leamington is dull now, is it not?" asked Florence.

"*A ne pas en finir!*" replied Ada, "but I suppose Dr. J—— is to drive Lord Thomas out of her head. Oh! and Captain Le Grange's duel—have you heard of that?"

"No—with whom? I really hear nothing," returned Florence.

"With the Count de Merville—some quarrel at the gaming-table."

"I hope he was hurt!" exclaimed Florence, eagerly.

"How cruel you are!" returned Ada. "He *was* hurt indeed, the Count's ball shattered one side of his face horribly; they didn't know when we left town yesterday whether he would recover or not—and that was four days after the duel took place."

"I always detested that man!" said Florence.

"Always?" inquired Miss Thomason, archly.

"Yes, I never saw so repulsive a person."

"Oh! and I know a little bit of scandal about Mr. Roxby, but I'll leave you to penetrate that when you come to town."

"No, do tell me!" said Florence.

Ada leaned over and whispered to her.

"No!" exclaimed Florence, "that *must* be scandal!"

"I told you it was," replied Ada.

"A woman of her age!" exclaimed Florence.

"Sixty-four," replied Ada.

"Have you come to the end of your London budget?" asked Mr. Thomason, looking with a smile at his daughter.

"At last, papa," replied Ada.

"What was that about Roxby?" asked Mr. Thomason.

"Oh, papa, you know!"

"Not I, indeed," replied Mr. Thomason.

"That he is paying his addresses to Mrs. Liversege," said Ada.

"Impossible—don't believe her, Miss Warrenne. These Londoners, when they come down into the country, are very much given to hoaxing their friends."

"I ought to apologise to Miss Warrenne," said Ada, "for talking so much about people that cannot amuse her; but that is a London fault, my dear Miss Warrenne—we get to talk of people, not things. At least, Charles tells me so."

"I wish you would recollect all your cousin tells you, my dear," said Mrs. Thomason.

"What a perfect creature I should be!" replied Ada. "Now, Miss Warrenne, by way of returning good for evil, give me the gratification of hearing you and your sister sing."

Maud rose and turned to look for Alice. She was seated at a table with a book of engravings open before her. Captain Scudamore, standing beside her, was describing the views to her in succession. They were of Indian scenery.

"Never interrupt a flirtation," said Ada, holding Maud back: "you don't know the mischief you may do."

"It's only Alice," said Maud simply; "she's not flirting."

"And besides, Miss Warrenne may have reasons for breaking off the interview!" said Florence.

Maud looked at Miss Reynolds with some astonishment.

Ada smiled archly.

"Alice dear, come and sing," said Maud.

Captain Scudamore hastened to clear the way for Alice, and to lead her to the piano. Mrs. Reynolds chose their song. Ada stood leaning on the instrument. Mr. Reynolds remarked gravely to Mr. Thomason, "that if he was fond of music, he would be highly gratified by the Miss Warrennes' performance."

"And you have never been to the Opera!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds; "what a treat is in store for you! With your talents, how you would enjoy Grisi! How you would dwell on every note of Moriani!"

"I wish you came to town," said Ada. "Mamma joins a friend in subscribing for a box, and we should be so pleased to take you!"

"The Miss Warrennes deserve to go to town," said Mr. Reynolds; "many persons seek only to gratify a taste for luxury and dissipation, by visiting the capital, but we must not forget that it offers to the few the highest intellectual gratifications."

"My dear," whispered Ada, "am I right in suspecting that *cher papa* is just a little severe in his notions?"

"Fancy!—intellectual gratifications!" retorted Florence.

"How delightfully Charles would get on with him," said Ada.

"I shouldn't wonder," returned Florence; "for, *entre nous*, my dear, I should imagine your cousin a formidable person to live with!"

"Don't you turn his head, then," said Ada, laughing, "since you would not have him if he proposed."

"I'll do my best to break his heart, I promise you," replied Florence, in the same tone.

Ada shook her head, and went back to Maud.

"Do you mean to let your little sister marry before you?" she asked.

Maud, who had not been enough in society to learn that half the conversation consists in threadbare jests upon marrying and giving in marriage, opened wide her large eyes, and turned them from Alice to Miss Thomason in unfeigned perplexity.

"Well, you will remember me when it comes to pass," continued Ada; "and now tell me something about your delightful brother. Does he like Paris?"

"He was not long there; but he was enraptured with Venice! I had four or five letters from him while he was in that city."

"Ah! Venice would suit him exactly—so romantic, so melancholy—wasn't he, Florence? Born to 'swim in a gondola,' as Portia has it. Did you ever act plays?"

"Never," said Maud.

"I was thinking you and your sister would make such a perfect Rosalind and Celia—it would be an illusion, but actually, Charles would not let me! It was certainly a very public affair; but I did not thank him for his interference."

"Very ridiculous," said Florence; "one is always *en scène* in society, whether we act tableaux or not."

"That's a very true remark, which I shall carry back to Charles," said Ada. "It strikes me, my dear Miss Warrenne, that you are acting a very unkind part by your sister, to break up such a very comfortable *tête-à-tête* as she seems to be enjoying with her handsome cavalier. What a pity that all his looks are wasted on her, dear little creature! but I hope you impress upon her that he is very good-looking!"

Maud, seeing that Ada was laughing, laughed too, without any definite idea of what she meant, touched Alice to recall her thoughts to the rest of the company, and reminding her that it was growing late, wished her hostess good-night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN LONDON.

The day at last arrived on which the Reynolds family were to leave Erlsmede for London, a period which had once been anticipated by Florence with as much pride as delight. Now, she would have given much to be permitted to remain at the Ferns, where at least she was a cared-for object both to the Colonel and her aunt; whereas in her new home she knew that her father's mind was fully occupied with his fresh ties; and for her step-mother, it was not in nature that she should feel any other solicitude for her welfare than a very earnest desire to get her married well and soon.

Certainly it does appear rather a selfish thing when a young woman marries a widower with a daughter old enough to take the head of his house, and educated to expect such a charge. The usurper cannot conceal from herself the fact that she is a very unwelcome addition to part of the family—that she is an accessory to what might be almost called an act of injustice, and that there is a little want of delicacy in thus wresting the sceptre from the lawful heir. But, perhaps, on these occasions, she may console herself by the idea that if she does not marry the victim, somebody else will; and, therefore, as she cannot shield his daughter from the injury, there is no reason why she should not reap the benefit.

Mrs. Reynolds was essentially selfish—a very nice woman, but selfish. She loved herself best; next, her children; and thirdly, Mr. Reynolds—for she was not one of those guilty widows who marry a man they don't like at all! On the contrary, she liked Mr. Reynolds very much, and he liked her still better, and treated her with great kindness, a commodity of which he had but little, and so kept it all for her. It was amazing how kind she was—how considerate. She had everything she wanted—a luxurious home, bright prospects for her children—jewels, clothes, money, to her heart's content—and out of her superfluities she was so willing to give—so generous; she subscribed to charities, and consulted Mrs. Creswick about forming plans for the relief of the poor.

And she was so polite, even friendly, to Florence! She would have been quite intimate with her step-daughter, if she would have met her advances; but to her crushed and embittered spirit, Mrs. Reynolds' kindly intercourse seemed nothing but the blandishment of a traitor.

As for Mr. Reynolds, when he found how greatly his daughter needed improvement, and how steadily she resisted it, he made no further attempt towards winning her confidence; and Florence felt that she was admitted into the household of two strangers, who, completely occupied with each other, had not a thought to waste upon her.

The carriage was at the door; but the horses were not yet put to; packing was going forward; Mr. Reynolds was standing at a window with little Edward in his arms, who seemed to enjoy overlooking the bustle. Lucy, kneeling on a chair beside him, amused herself by trying to recognize the different packages as they were being carried from the house to the carriage.

"That's papa's dressing-case," she exclaimed; "I know it by the purple cover; and that's mamma's bonnet-box—there are three bonnets inside; that's papa's writing-desk. Look, Edward, it won't go under the seat—there are so many things already."

"Where will they put our playthings, papa?" asked Edward.

"Nottridge will take care of them. He has put them in a safe place, I dare say," returned Mr. Reynolds.

"Where, papa?" repeated the child.

"I do not know; but you may trust to Nottridge; he never forgets you."

"Are they in the boot?" said the child.

"They are gone on with my trunks, by the carrier," said Mrs. Reynolds, turning round. "Come to me, Edward, and don't be troublesome to papa."

In reply to this invitation, the child gave a sharp little cry, and hid his face on Mr. Reynolds' shoulder, while he grasped the collar of his coat tightly with both hands.

"He is not troublesome," said Mr. Reynolds, gravely.

A smile passed between Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Creswick.

"Perhaps, aunt," said Florence, who, taking no interest in the preparations, had remained silently leaning back in her chair, with her dog in her lap—"perhaps you would have the kindness to take care of Fidelio for me during our stay in town. I shall reclaim him if we return to this part of the country."

"Gladly, my dear," replied Mrs. Creswick; "and I hope to restore him to you in excellent health at the end of a few months."

"But why not take him with you, my dear Florence?" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds; "such an amusement—such a treasure of a dog!"

"Is not the little white dog to go with us, papa?" cried Edward.

"Oh, papa!" echoed Lucy.

For in spite of the predictions of Florence, the children seldom went out of doors without enticing Fidelio to accompany them; and Florence had often (on inquiring for her dog as she returned from a ride or a drive) had the pleasure of learning that it was serving as a plaything to the little Lyles.

"Are you tired of your lap-dog?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"Not at all," replied Florence; "but it struck me that the restraint of a London life would hardly suit him; and knowing my aunt to be fond of dogs, I had the less hesitation in consigning him to her care."

"It is such a pity, though, to be parted from your favourite," said

Mrs. Reynolds, compassionating the wistful glances of her children. "You know, there are always the parks——"

"I do not think dogs are allowed in the parks," replied Florence coldly.

"No, but in the carriage with us," pleaded Mrs. Reynolds.

"Thank you," replied Florence; "I leave him in excellent hands."

"Papa must buy Edward a little white dog, if he is good," said Mrs. Reynolds.

Florence ground her teeth, and turned from the child's expressions of delight, with a pang at her heart, that blanched her face.

Mrs. Creswick regarded her with uneasiness. Mrs. Reynolds moved off to put on her travelling dress, and Mrs. Creswick, drawing nearer to her niece, said to her in a low tone:

"My dear, our own happiness is the sport of every breath; but there are very few individuals who have not the power to contribute to the happiness of other people. This reflection should be a source of lasting comfort."

"*Apropos* to what, aunt?" returned Florence; "do you infer that I ought to offer Fidelio to those children, to propitiate them or their parents?"

"My remark had a wider aim," replied Mrs. Creswick; "if you wish me to speak more clearly——"

"By all means," said Florence.

"You feel, then, that your prospects are clouded," said Mrs. Creswick; "your happiness is impaired; but even in the circle to which you at present belong, your conduct can either impair or increase the comfort of your relations. For all our powers we are answerable; and if we annoy where we might console, and chill where we might conciliate, we are neglecting means of usefulness for which we shall hereafter have to account. And trials, my dear Florence, are meant to soften, not to embitter."

"*Trials*—not *injuries!*" replied Florence, rising.

"Injuries from men are trials from God," replied Mrs. Creswick.

Florence paused, looked earnestly at her aunt, and then hastily left the room.

At last the travellers were ready—the adieux were spoken—the carriage swept away at a good pace. It was one of those foreign conveyances holding four people, and having at least two-thirds inconveniently filled up with windows. Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds sat on one seat; Florence and the two children on the seat opposite. The children, like all other children, could not be supposed to make a journey of five hours without fidgeting; for the first twenty miles, they asked about every ten minutes if they were not near London—then they wanted to eat, and crumbled biscuit and gingerbread over the dark blue folds of Florence's velvet pellisse—they then took a fancy to change places with each other perpetually; this led to noise

and laughter, and a great deal of scuffling, during which they continually pushed each other against Florence, knocked her muff off her lap, and endangered the safety of her watch, and finally, insisted on taking turns to look out of window, which they achieved by sitting on "papa's" knee, and kicking Florence with their little feet whenever anything occurred to delight them particularly. Add to this, that being a raw, drizzling day, Mrs. Reynolds, who was very chilly, kept all the windows shut; while Florence, like most English-bred girls, was indifferent to the weather, and absolutely gasped for fresh air. She took refuge in the coldest tranquillity, and reclining with half-shut eyes in her corner of the carriage, never stirred nor spoke a word during the tumult that surrounded her.

At last, as the light faded, they entered London. The carriage drew up before the portals of a splendid house. Mr. Reynolds handed out his wife, and welcomed her gravely, but earnestly, to her first English home. The children and Florence got out together, she hardly knew how, and followed their parents into the hall. The air was laden with perfume, lamps gleamed from perfect thickets of greenhouse plants, which, raised upon stages, reached up to the roof. The massive staircase was illuminated by statues with antique lamps suspended from their hands. The drawing-room was a model of costly luxury.

Mrs. Reynolds was in a pretty little ecstasy at every step; everything was exactly as she could wish; the flowers were delicious; the entrance imposing; the mirrors and furniture splendid. Mr. Reynolds's taste was complimented, and his kindness warmly thanked, when she found in the second drawing-room a harmonium handsomer than Alice Warrenne's. Giving Mr. Reynolds her bonnet to hold, which always seemed to encumber her graceful head, she flitted round the room, dived into all the easy-chairs, tried the couches, opened the inlaid cabinets, and finally sat down before the blazing fire to warm her fingers. Harley had swept the children into the nursery as they were going upstairs; but Florence had entered the drawing-room and sunk on the first chair near the entrance, weary and sick at heart. She was near a window, and she turned her head and looked out into the street to avoid the raptures of Mrs. Reynolds.

The streets were dirty, and a drizzling rain fell: without, all was gloomy; and within, Mrs. Reynolds was seated on the hearth. Perfectly unable to support the misery of such a return to the home where she had once expected to rule, she rose, and said to her stepmother, in a feeble voice:

"Perhaps, Mrs. Reynolds, you will allow me to ring for my maid, and retire for the night. I feel a cold coming on, and I find that in such a case, one's own room is the only place."

Mrs. Reynolds started up at once—all active kindness. She would have rung the bell herself, but that her husband saved her the trouble. She called for a taper, sent word that Louise was to await

them in Miss Reynolds's room, and insisted on going up with her to see that she was comfortable.

"I thought you looked pale during the journey," said she; "but I hoped it was only a headache brought on by the motion of the carriage. But a cold is serious and provoking, for we are engaged out every day this week. Dinners! stupid affairs, I daresay; only I want you to look very, very——" (she paused, and looked very archly at Florence). "Louise, you should warm that dressing-gown; warm everything when one is going to have a cold. What a country! What a climate! Do you ever take arrow-root? I will send you some white soup and some chicken; and then go to bed at once, my dear Florence, and drink no end of hot coffee. I shall step in and see you before I go to bed, but I will be careful not to wake you if you are asleep."

All this was so kind that Florence tried to receive it cordially—not to be ungracious in her tones. She began to feel the importance of having a friend; and to find that her beauty alone would not secure her consideration at home. She found, too, that the furniture of her dressing-room might content a more fastidious person than herself; and however dreary she might feel her life below-stairs, here was a retreat where she might possibly, with her novels and her piano, enjoy herself very much. Here she might think over the past, and lay plans for future triumphs. She began pretty comfortably—with her couch drawn close to the fire, and plenty of fragrant coffee on the little ebony table before her, she lay wrapped in her wadded silk dressing-gown, with a new French novel in her hand, and enjoyed her first evening in town more than she could have expected.

CHAPTER XXV.

MUSIC AND JEWELS.

Perhaps the white soup worked wonders—perhaps a long night's rest restored Florence to something like her usual spirits; for she came down to breakfast the next morning in high beauty, and with something like a determination to look upon the bright side of her lot.

The first words that her father addressed to her were not of a very cheering nature.

"I am glad to see you down-stairs," he said; "unless you are under medical care it is a weak habit of indulgence to keep your room and assume the habits of an invalid."

This speech, which seemed to cut off from her the power of retreating at will into her luxurious little dressing-room, did not contribute to keep up her spirits.

Nothing could surpass the perfect independence of her life at Erlsmede; with the exception of a grave speech now and then from

her aunt, her time was absolutely at her own disposal. Colonel Creswick had always considered it a proper tribute to her youth and beauty, to be invariably ready to ride or walk with her, and to forward any plans that she set on foot. If she wished for a picnic, it was to be made; if she desired to go to a ball, a party was formed; if she wanted a bouquet, the greenhouses were pillaged. If she chose to have a cold, she took to her room, her aunt pitied her and sat with her, and the Colonel sent up messages and hot-house grapes at discretion. She never entered a room without his placing her a chair —never left it without his flying to open the door.

It was true he paid the same courtesies invariably to her aunt, and she had not valued them at the time because he was an ugly little man, and never wore two wigs in succession of the same colour, which causes were quite sufficient to ensure him the contempt of Florence; but she found it quite a different thing to go without these attentions.

At the breakfast-table, instead of her aunt's kind inquiries concerning her plans for the day, and the Colonel's bantering reproaches upon her cruelty or her conquests of the preceding evening, a solemn silence was observed. Mr. Reynolds read the papers with the closest attention, and Mrs. Reynolds seemed to find the most exquisite enjoyment in observing her husband's abstraction; for, with the most animated smiles, she pointed the observation of Florence to this interesting spectacle, and corresponded with her by signs concerning the courtesies of the table.

After breakfast Mr. Reynolds went to his club, and his wife to her children, and Florence fled to her room and looked over her clothes and trinkets.

The next duty to be fulfilled was a long course of shopping with her step-mother. Florence liked this occupation very well; they went to mercers and milliners, they bought trinkets and gloves and fans, and supplied themselves with every new and useless decoration. Sometimes it was Florence who remembered some imperative want; sometimes it was Mrs. Reynolds who suddenly became conscious that life would be a burden, if she were not furnished with some idle *bijou* of the day.

Much as Florence regretted that she was not mistress of the beautiful equipage that conveyed them, vexatious as it was to see Mrs. Reynolds ring for the carriage, and to hear her order the coachman to Harding's, or Howell and James's, yet her morning was spent too much after her own heart to be altogether regretted.

On her return, she had not time to take off her bonnet before the house was besieged with visitors. But here all was not unimpaired felicity. The people who came knew Mrs. Reynolds exceedingly well either in person or by name. They were also well acquainted with Mr. Reynolds. But they did not understand what they were to do with Florence. She was merely a young lady.

People from India have more contempt for single women than any other people that the sun shines upon; and when it is remembered that most of these ladies have rushed over there with nothing but a box of fine clothes, and their sixteen or seventeen years to take into the market, one may imagine of what desperate importance they consider it that every woman should secure to herself a husband. Florence *might* marry, but they were not disposed to give her the credit of it beforehand; so after they had been introduced to her, and asked whether she had been out to India, they let her alone. Florence was by no means behind-hand in returning their indifference. She drew her chair even nearer to the fender, took up an Annual and amused herself by looking over the engravings until the visitors were gone.

At length the tide ebbed, and the last guest bade Mrs. Reynolds farewell. Then Mrs. Reynolds congratulated Florence on their release, rang for her children, and with her guitar in her lap, and her feet on a faldstool, she sat over the fire playing and singing to the little ones, who nestled on the rug at her feet.

Then came the question: "And what shall you wear, my dear Florence, to-night?"

"I hardly know; I am rather chilly. I think I shall wear my black velvet," said Florence.

"And your hair?"

"Why," said Florence, reflecting, "it's very difficult to manage with light hair."

"I wish you would wear blue," said Mrs. Reynolds; "you look so charming in blue."

"I haven't a blue velvet," said Florence, "and I'm so cold to-day; it is wretched weather."

"I'll tell you what would look very pretty in your hair," said Mrs. Reynolds; "green leaves."

"Yes, but that's rather middle-aged," said Florence.

"Is it? Then I am sure you do right to avoid it!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds. "I don't think there's anything gentlemen have such a horror of in single women as their being of no particular age."

"Pearls don't show in my hair," said Florence; "and jewels are too much for me. I have some very good amethysts, which I never use; and one does not exactly like to wear flowers at a dinner; though one sees it, I don't think it is the best possible taste."

"No; Mr. Reynolds does not like flowers, he prefers jewels," said Mrs. Reynolds; "but I have it! Turquoises; you would look perfectly angelic in turquoises! Only try. Lucy, my darling, go up into mamma's dressing-room, and ask Vining for the sandal-wood casket, and bring it down carefully, like a little pet."

Lucy brought the perfumed casket to her mamma, who selected from it a beautiful set of turquoises—comb, bracelets, brooch, and earrings. She tried them upon Florence, and was so delighted with

their effect, that she insisted with much warmth and cordiality on her accepting them, and wearing them that very evening.

Florence hesitated a little at accepting a present of so much value; but Mrs. Reynolds was urgent.

"Do take them; you really will oblige me," she said; "they were given me by poor General Gordon. Do you know, I shall be glad to get rid of them, for I actually never wore them. I didn't quite like to put them on; for very soon after his death, I married poor Captain Lyle."

"Were you married to General Gordon?" asked Florence, in some surprise.

"No, my dear; he died a few days before my marriage with him. I'll tell you how it happened. I went over to a sister who was married to a Mr. King, a judge; very well off they were, and of course I hoped that I should do as well for myself as my sister had done. She was very good-looking, I should observe, and fair, which is so prized in India. With my dark eyes I was rather afraid. But, my very first ball, General Gordon fell in love with me, and proposed a week afterwards. Such a frightful old object as the General I had never seen in my whole life. I almost screamed when Mr. King came in one morning at tiffin and told me he had received a very great offer for me. The General had a capital appointment, so I accepted him directly. He gave me a great many things; there's a fan I'll show you, which was thought to be the finest in the world, and a diamond cross, which was worth eight hundred guineas; and the day before we were to be married, he died. I kept the presents, of course, and everybody pitied me very much. But it pleased a merciful Providence to support me, for I was not the least attached to him, and I soon got over it. An hour before he died, he sent me a ring from his finger, with a very kind message; but I wouldn't touch it, for I was afraid he had died of cholera. So the kitmudgar took it back, and I daresay kept it—an emerald worth a hundred pounds—and after all it was nothing but the gout that he died of. Only if we had but been married first, what a pension I should have had! A fortnight afterwards Lyle proposed, and we were married in three weeks."

"And were you attached to him?" asked Florence.

"Oh, yes! and we led the gayest life! He had a Staff appointment at Poonah. We always kept open house—you in England have no idea of the sort of life. He was killed, poor fellow! When I came down to Bombay I had three offers directly; there was a Captain Meerschaum, on one of the Dragoon regiments at Bombay; but really, his pipe was never out of his mouth, and some people actually said he chewed tobacco. Such wretches should really not be allowed to live! And there was a Mr. Macartney—in the Civil Service. Such a handsome man! He drew beautifully, and was always sketching the natives; and I really believe he spoke every

dialect in the country; but there was a Hindu woman, and a whole colony of semi-Macartneys, neither black nor white; at least, that was the report; but people are very scandalous, my dear Florence, in India; and Mr. Reynolds—he was just coming to England, and that was such a temptation; besides, I was excessively attached to him. I was very glad to leave India. I don't think I shall mind the cold in England the least in the world! If you warm the house from top to bottom, and never stir out but in a carriage—except in summer—I don't see that one need suffer from the temperature."

Florence acquiesced, and for some time sat pondering upon her step-mother's singularities. Such a wonderful mixture of avarice and generosity, struck her in the first instance. Regretting the pension she had lost by the death of her first lover, and giving carelessly away a set of turquoises that must have been worth seventy or eighty guineas. And then it was strange that Florence, who was as willing as any one to enter into an unprincipled marriage, could not but feel shocked to hear another person put her very sentiments into words. Perhaps it was the best practical lesson she could have received, to see her own defects thus exhibited to her in the character of another. To hear this pretty little engaging woman quietly discuss this traffic of her person, this rapid change of masters, as the proper and inevitable destiny of her sex, would have been rather startling to a person unused to worldly society, and would have led them to believe that the singular freaks of the ancient Babylonian ladies were very praiseworthy and reasonable, and that Christianity, instead of dispelling those odious heathen observances, had merely sanctioned and legalised them.

However, Florence accepted the turquoises of the lamented General with a very good grace, and she began to feel something like cordiality for her father's warm-hearted little wife.

The conference now broke up. Mrs. Reynolds said she should lie down for an hour before dinner, and then when the children took their tea in her dressing-room, she would take a cup with them; and she was preparing to depart with a child in each hand, when Mr. Reynolds came into the room.

"Is that you, Mr. Reynolds?" she said. "I can hardly see by the firelight, and you stole in so quietly. I'm just going up to see the darlings have their tea. Have you anything to say to me first?"

"Not to you, Mrs. Reynolds," he replied, with a very grim look; "but I desire to speak with Florence."

"I hope nothing is the matter?" said Mrs. Reynolds, eagerly, for she was alarmed by her husband's manner.

"Nothing, thank you," replied Mr. Reynolds, shaking hands gravely with her, as if he had not seen her for a month, which ceremony was intended by him as a very affectionate demonstration.

"Then when you have said your say," returned Mrs. Reynolds,

playfully, "come up into my room for a cup of tea; it will do you good before you go out."

"I shall be much obliged to you," he replied, and then there was a dead silence until the father and daughter were left alone.

The fire burned brightly enough to distinguish their faces; Florence grew pale with apprehension, and her heart beat—she hardly knew why. She, who had been so wilful and haughty to every one else, felt that in her father she had met with more than her match.

Mr. Reynolds looked darker and darker. At last he began:

"Listen to me, Florence; I am going to speak seriously to you."

She had no doubt whatever of his seriousness, but she did not like this opening. As soon as he thought she had digested his exordium, he continued:

"A very few minutes' conversation with you would convince any educated man of your deplorable want of cultivation. You have spent many years of your life in the most pitiable idleness. You know (as far as I have been able to observe the extent of your faculties) absolutely nothing. Beyond a love of gaudy clothes, and a certain assurance in your manners, you have reaped—I do not say no *advantages*—but actually no *impressions* from the expensive school where you received your education."

Florence, indignant as she was, made no reply. Her father went on:

"Even the example of your excellent aunt has awakened in you no regret at the degraded condition of your intellect, and the sinful frivolity of your life. This, though it was a shock, a disappointment, I soon found that I must bear. But I confess, that till this morning, I imagined that this was to be the extent of my mortification."

Florence grew more alarmed. He certainly could hardly clothe his meaning in stronger words. She dreaded what might come next.

"I now find," said Mr. Reynolds, with an ironical bitterness that quite overwhelmed his daughter, "that I may congratulate myself on the possession of a child whose *vices* are the theme of the clubs, whose allurements and whose treachery are alike subject to the sport and the censure of all the idle men about town."

"And who presumed to tell you this?" asked Florence, rising with all the indignation of outraged virtue, for she really entertained the boarding-school notion that as long as a woman did not break the seventh commandment, no crime could be laid to her charge.

"It matters little who was the teller," said Mr. Reynolds, still more sternly. "It was some one who did not quite attach the same meaning that I do to such odious conduct; who treated it as a jest, and told me with a laugh that my daughter was an accomplished coquette!"

Florence sank back in her chair. If coquetry was held to be a crime, she did not know what excuse she could urge.

"I consider coquetry," said Mr. Reynolds, "the most despicable

species of swindling—an infamous method of attraction, beyond which I know no greater degradation. But your notoriety has attained a climax which I should have hoped would have struck horror even into your callous heart. Dishonestly tampering with the expectations of an unfortunate man, you drove the wretch to suicide!"

Florence burst into tears—not from any compassion to the memory of Captain O'Neill, but from feeling literally crushed beneath the unbending severity of her father.

Mr. Reynolds waited in silence until she should have recovered herself.

She soon began to struggle for speech.

"It is well," she said, "that they have not also laid to my charge the death of Captain Le Grange, which I saw in the paper this morning. I had as much to do with the one as the other!"

"Was that duel then undertaken in your behalf?" asked Mr. Reynolds coldly.

"Certainly not!" replied Florence; "all London knows that it arose from a quarrel at *écarté*."

"Then you had *not* as much to do with the one as with the other," replied her father.

Florence covered her face with her hands.

"I believe that from habits of falsehood, you have almost lost the power of distinguishing the truth," said Mr. Reynolds. "But we have spoken of the past—I have now come to address you upon the future."

She listened silently in terror; she could not depict to herself the future that was to follow.

"I will not have my daughter bring public disgrace upon my name, if I can control her propensities," said Mr. Reynolds. "Hear then what I have resolved upon. I am well aware that men do not make proposals to a woman unless they have received from her an adequate degree of encouragement. The next offer that you receive, I command you to accept, since it will be always in your power by the prudence of your conduct to avoid such overtures from any one that you disapprove; and I will not permit you, while under my protection, to hold out to any man false indications of your favour to be withdrawn at your first capricious change of will. Should you persist in your present unworthy course, I frankly tell you that I will no longer consider you as a daughter, either in affording you present shelter or future support. I will prove to the world that if I cannot restrain your evil propensities, at least I will not afford to them any sort of countenance. You know now on what terms you hold my favour. You will, perhaps, be cautious how you encourage a suitor whom you must accept when he declares himself, and whom you must retain when you have once engaged him, on pain of incurring my utmost displeasure."

He rose as he spoke, and quitted the room; and Florence

remained motionless, overpowered, seated in the same attitude as when he left her, until her maid appeared at the door of the darkened room, and discreetly inquired if Mademoiselle was aware that it wanted only twenty minutes to the hour that the carriage was ordered to be at the door.

She rose mechanically, and dragged herself heavily up-stairs; she suffered her maid to attire her without uttering a word; and on returning to the drawing-room she found Mrs. Reynolds, wrapped from head to foot in a great black cashmere, waiting for her to go to the carriage. Mr. Reynolds came in with precisely the grave calmness of his every-day manner, offered his arm to his wife, saw that she was well-protected from the chilling air, and conducted her to the carriage.

When they reached their destination, and Mrs. Reynolds threw aside her shawl, Florence was really startled by the splendour of her appearance. She wore one of those gorgeous silk dresses, where a black ground is interwoven with a magnificent pattern of scarlet and gold; her only ornaments were a ruby bracelet of great value and a semi-circle of rubies in her black hair. Perhaps she was a little rouged, for a faint crimson glow was visible on her oval cheek. She must have looked brilliant everywhere; but her entrance into the drawing-room of Sir Ralph Masters was like a fairy vision descending among the guests; for a more ordinary set of people, men and women, could scarcely have been brought together under the sun.

Lady Masters was a gaunt, bony woman of fifty, very tall and very black, with something of a moustache, two or three teeth, and a neck in form and colour like a bundle of rope-yarn. Her grey hair bristled out at the back of her neck, and a brown front was tied across her forehead with a velvet strap. She had a loud voice, and wrung the hands of her visitors in an excruciating manner; Florence did not recover her grip for some hours.

It so happened that all the ladies were middle-aged, and the gentlemen still more advanced in life. Mrs. Reynolds was petted and fêted, but Florence was nobody; and she would have been shipwrecked, as the Indians call it, when dinner was announced, if an orange-coloured judge, who was escorting a dragoon of a woman in white satin, had not offered her his other arm and helped her down the gilded staircase.

Florence was not a *gourmande*—she did not care the least for the dinner, which was as splendid as money could procure; all she cared to get was a particular Japanese lily which stood in a golden vase in the centre of the table. The orange-coloured judge was good-natured enough to reach it for her on the end of a fork, and she amused herself with it while the tedious courses were in progress. Conversation sped around her, but it was of people, things, and places of which she had never heard, and never cared to hear. The gentlemen were very attentive to the ladies; but it was not the kind of easy gallantry to

which she had been accustomed. There is no end to the shades and gradations which exist in society; and in the circle of Lady Jane Lockwood, the Creswicks, and even the Thomasons, there was a *laisser aller*, a lightness, and even a little touch of literature, which was different from the wealthy and formal circle in which her father seemed to move.

She saw, at a glance, how little such society could do for her—it would neither amuse nor benefit her. She could not marry the orange-coloured judge or any of his compeers. Her only hope was in her former friends. In their society she might sometimes forget her present position, and perhaps yet meet with a satisfactory proposal.

(*To be continued.*)

SING HEY! FOR MY LOVE.

In orchard shadows where brown bees croon,
I couched on the grassy leas,
Which at fragrant noon are all thickly strewn,
With the rose-lit blooms of the trees:
And I sang with the birds till the echoes rung,
As amidst the grasses I lay;
Sing hey—for my Love is as young—as young,
And my Love is as sweet as they!

I sought the garden, and drank my fill,
Of the dew-steeped breath of the rose,
The air was a-thrill with the blackbirds' trill,
From lawns where the lilac grows:
And I sang with the birds 'neath the summer blue,
As I leant on the meadow bar,
Sing hey—for my Love is so true, so true—
And as sweet as the roses are!

I watched the sweep of the cedars bough,
Ink-black, on the lucent sky—
And the films that flow round the young moon's brow
As she mounts to her throne on high:
The heads of the roses seemed bent in prayer,
And I too prayed for my Love—
Who is holy and pure as the angels are,
That dwell in the Heavens above!

Helen Marion Burnside.

CIVILITY.

By the Author of "How to be Happy, though Married.

A QUAKER, who had made a large fortune as a merchant in Liverpool, was once asked how he had managed it. "By a single article," he answered, in which every one may deal who pleases —civility." Lord Burleigh was also aware of the financial value of the same commodity, for he used to say to Queen Elizabeth: "Win hearts, and you have people's purses at command." Now the surest way of winning hearts, is to form the habit of being civil in word and deed to everybody.

Not long ago, a story went the round of the papers, of a man who had put himself about to oblige a lady—a perfect stranger—and who, thirty years after, was surprised by receiving news that she had left him a legacy of fifteen thousand pounds. An even larger sum (£20,000) was left by an old lady to a gentleman for no other reason than because he once held her pew-door open. The famous Dr. Johnson has been described as "a bear who was privileged in rudeness," yet he was a loser by his incivility. When asked why he was not invited out to dine, as Garrick was, he answered, as if it were a triumph for him: "Because great lords and ladies don't like to have their mouths stopped."

Incivility is a losing game, and it is only the very rich who can afford it. A man said the other day, "It cost me just a thousand pounds to take that man's chair." He had taken a chair that was reserved for another man, and by doing so, had given so much offence, that the man would not do business with him, and in this way one special contract was lost, which would have brought in a thousand pounds.

A case of churlishness being fitly punished is thus described by one who observed it:

"I got into a first-class carriage at Ascot, in which was an elderly and irritable gentleman, who occupied one seat and placed his bag upon another. Just before we started a youth came running up and tried to jump in. 'This compartment is full, sir,' said the old gentleman; 'that seat is taken by a friend of mine, who has put his bag there.' The youth plumped down with the remark, 'All right, I'll stay till he comes,' and took the bag on his knees. In vain the old person looked daggers, the boy was imperturbable; the 'friend' did not appear, and the train presently moved off. As we glided down the platform, the interloper flung the bag through the window, with the quiet remark, 'Your friend's missed his train evidently; we mustn't let him lose his luggage into the bargain.' I shall never, to my dying day, forget the expression on the old gentleman's wrinkled countenance."

Lord Ellenborough punished himself for rudeness to his wife in a way somewhat similar. The lady wished once to accompany him on circuit, and the judge consented on condition that she did not tuck any bandboxes into the carriage as she had too often done before. They both set out, but had not gone far, before the judge, stretching out his legs under the seat, kicked against one of the flimsy receptacles which he had prohibited. Down went the window with a bang, and out went the bandbox into the ditch. The startled coachman pulled up, but was ordered to drive on and let the thing lie where it was. They reached the assize town in due course, and his lordship proceeded to robe for court. "And now, where's my wig?—where's my wig?" he demanded, when everything else had been donned. "Your wig, my lord," replied the servant, tremulously, "was in that bandbox your lordship threw out of the window as we came along."

About fourteen hundred police in London can take care of about five million people. How is it done? Chiefly by moral force, and above all, by civility. The Chief Commissioner of the Force said on a certain occasion that it was by "strict attention to duty, by sobriety, and above all, by civility," that the police endeavoured to do their duty. "I lay great stress upon civility," said the Chief Commissioner, "for I think it is the great characteristic of the Metropolitan Police Force."

It is said that as many as fifteen hundred trains go out from Clapham Junction every day. Of course this is very confusing to passengers, and some old women of both sexes, if there is a wrong train to get into, are sure to enter it. Imagine then the questions that are asked the guards and porters at this and other large junctions in the excursion season. Yet these men nearly always reply most civilly and repeat their answers many times. Even the senseless way people crowd and scramble for tickets seldom provokes the clerks into rudeness. Once the writer remarked sympathetically to an official that he must be very much hurried, and he replied, "Indeed, sir, I have not time to be in a hurry." This reminds me of a reply that was made to a friend of mine at a crowded railway station in Paris, when he told the man who sold tickets that he wished him to serve him quickly, as he was in a hurry. "Every one is in a hurry," was the laconic answer, and my friend felt rebuked.

Here is an anecdote that goes far to explain how King Victor Emmanuel welded Italy into one state under the House of Saxony. After a battle, in which the carnage was terrible, he went to visit a field hospital. Speaking pleasantly, as his wont was, to a poor fellow who had lost both his legs, he asked him about his family, telling the aide-de-camp to make a note of their names, and promising to look after them. The mutilated invalid said, in a flush of grateful feeling, "May I be allowed to kiss the King's hand?" "My friend, I should much rather shake yours," said Victor Emmanuel, shaking the hand of the soldier.

Lord Chesterfield declared that it was his manner, irresistible either by man or woman, that made the fortune of the Duke of Marlborough. The great influence which the late Bishop of Manchester exercised upon all classes was gained by his great civility to every one, especially to the humblest and poorest. On one occasion, when he was leaving some place by train, his chaplain said "Thank you," to the porter who shut the door of the carriage. "That's right," said the Bishop, "I always like to hear people say 'thank you.'"

Civility is like an air-cushion; there's nothing in it, but it eases the joints wonderfully. A barrister who has an oily, insinuating manner, gets far more information from witnesses, and therefore more reputation for himself than another who tries to bully them. And for surgeons and physicians a good manner is by far the most important part of their stock-in-trade On one occasion a "calamity of surgery" had taken place in the consulting room of the late Sir Morell Mackenzie. A patient had died after a slight operation; the man's brother called with the intention of giving the great surgeon a "bit of his mind" on the subject. Such, however, was the fascination of Mackenzie's manner, that the indignant brother submitted his own throat to examination, and paid the customary fee for the privilege without a murmur.

And if civility is a profitable investment in other places, it pays even better in our own homes. Courtesy to strangers may leave its mark in a cash account, and entitle us in other ways to be called successful people; but what is that compared with the reward to be met with in a happy home? It does not "pay" to be indifferent to the feelings of any one, but least of all to those of a life-partner. When people are tied for life, it is their mutual interest not to grow weary of one another, and the best possible safeguards they can adopt are kindness and civility. How the whole day is rendered dismal and disagreeable when there has been "a storm" in the breakfast "tea-cup" between husband and wife! As far as happiness goes, each must confess in the evening, "I have lost a day." Many a child goes astray, not because there is a want of prayer or virtue at home, but simply because home lacks sunshine. A child needs smiles as much as flowers need sunbeams. It has a right to common civility, and feels rudeness quite as much as grown-up people. Even dumb animals claim and can appreciate civility. "Treat a cow as if she were a lady," is the superscription over the cow-houses of a large dairy farmer in Cheshire. The farmer's milk of kindness is doubtless returned in real milk.

"The idea of calling this the Wild West!" exclaimed a lady travelling in Montana, to one of the old hands. "Why I never saw such politeness anywhere. The men here all treat each other like gentlemen in a drawing-room." "Yes, marm, it's safer," laconically replied the native with a glance at his six-shooter. "The greatest snob is polite when he knows that it is safer or more to his interest to be so"

The test, therefore, of true civility is, to behave well to the weak and those in a humbler position in life. The commanding-officer of a certain Hussar regiment felt this to be the case, for he used to say to the young officers when they joined: "You know, Mr. ——, that every regiment has its 'side,' its 'swagger,' its 'good form.' Now that of the —— Hussars is to have none; so as long as you are with us, you must treat the humblest in the land with as much civility as the highest."

Not long ago, at the London Guildhall, Sir Alfred Wills proved that he could be polite to a barrister pleading before him. The court even in the morning was so dark that his lordship had to have two candles by the side of his desk. A Q.C. was engaged in reading some correspondence, and noticing that the learned counsel had a difficulty in reading, the judge gave his candles to an officer of the court and had them placed upon the table before the reader, suffering temporary inconvenience until two more candles could be obtained for himself. The manner of doing it made the act even more graceful. About a fortnight after he was made judge, the same true gentleman was seen carrying a hod of coals upstairs for his charwoman, whom he had met struggling painfully with the load.

This reminds us of a man of whom Charles Lamb speaks. He would be outdone by no one in politeness. Not only would he give the wall to any ancient female beggar, but, reaching to a higher flight—

> "E'en with his best umbrella would not scorn
> To shield from rain the poorest dame forlorn,"

though it were but an old market woman whose basket of fruit he would thus protect from damage.

Dr. Parke, who accompanied Stanley in his last expedition to Africa, must be a gentleman not merely in name but in reality, for he behaved towards women in the Dark Continent as he would towards his lady friends in London. An instance of this sort of politeness is related by Darwin in reference to the people of Chili amongst whom he was travelling. He was out one day with two of the natives when they were passed by a very fat, small negress, riding astride on a mule. She had such an enormous *goitre* that it was scarcely possible to avoid gazing at her; but his companions, as if in apology, immediately made the salute of the country by taking off their hats. "Where," asks Darwin, "would one of the lower or higher classes in Europe have shown such feeling politeness to a poor and miserable object of a degraded race?"

The mention of this negress makes me think of a story that is told of Sir William Jones who was Governor of Jamaica.

When he returned the salute of a negro he was told that he had done what was very unfashionable. In those days negroes were not supposed to have feelings. "Perhaps so," said Sir William; "but I would not be outdone in good manners by a negro." When Pope

Clement XIV. (Ganganelli) ascended the Papal chair, the ambassador of the several states represented at his court waited on him with their congratulations. When they were introduced, and bowed, he returned the compliment by bowing also; on which the master of the ceremonies told his Highness that he should not have returned the salute. "Oh, I beg your pardon," said the Pontiff, "I have not been Pope long enough to forget good manners."

People forget that when they are rude to the poor, to subordinates or even to those who have been rude to them, they dishonour themselves. "My child," said a father to his daughter, "treat everybody with politeness, even though they are rude to you; for remember that you show courtesy to others, not because they are ladies, but because you are one."

The most uncivil people are those who, not being sure of their position in society, think that they must always assert it. People who have risen from nothing cannot afford to be gracious. The following illustrates what we mean.

There is in London a very skilful American dentist who has had the pleasure (to him, at least) of extracting royal teeth. He was invited to a garden-party at Marlborough House, where he met about fifty of his patients. They all cut him. Soon after he found himself face to face with the Prince and Princess, and they at once gave him the most cordial reception, and shook him warmly by the hand. Immediately every one of the fifty patients pressed up to the dentist, and shook hands with equal warmth. If Napoleon Bonaparte had been royal by birth, he would not have gone about his Court, as he did, saying to the ladies, "How red your elbows are!" "What an ugly headdress you have on!" "Do you never change your gown? I have seen you in that twenty times!"—and so on.

What is called good society is pleasant to live in because those who move in it have learned to control their tempers, are polite and forbearing to each other, and do not say things that grate upon the feelings. Still, we are far from saying or thinking that true courtesy or "the beauty of the heart" belongs to any one class of society. Here is an illustration of equal politeness being exhibited by the so-called upper and lower classes.

One day, in hastily turning the corner of a London street, a young lady ran against a ragged little beggar boy, and almost knocked him down. She turned round and said, "I beg your pardon, my little boy. I am very sorry that I ran against you." The "arab" was astonished. He looked at her for a moment, and then, taking off his cap, he made a low bow and said, while a broad smile spread itself all over his face: "You can hev my parding, miss, and welcome; and the next time you run agin me you may knock me clean down, and I won't say a word." After the lady had passed on, he turned to his chum and remarked: "I say, Jim, it's the first time I ever had anybody ask my parding, and it's kind o' took me off my feet."

No less surprised at the first reception of common civility was a servant who has lately gone into the employment of a friend of mine. My friend said "Thank you" for some little service rendered. The girl seemed astonished, and explained that in her former situations she never was thanked for anything. She must have lived with savages.

We have heard of a family of Welsh colliers so celebrated for good manners that they were called "the civil family." The only education they received was at a Sunday-school provided for juveniles and adults by a lady of the neighbourhood. This was the explanation of their civility—they followed the teaching of the lady and her daughters, and learnt politeness from the Sacred Word.

A little anecdote, recorded of one of the boys of this "civil family," will illustrate this.

The lady aforesaid was on her way to visit the sick father. She met the lad as he was wading ankle-deep in mud through a lane. He turned with her, anxiously watching her steps. They came at last to a puddle that she could not cross. The little fellow advanced before her, took two steps in the mud, and leapt over the plash, leaving behind him his wooden shoes. The lady, glancing at his bare feet, said, "Little boy, you have left your shoes behind you." "They are for you to walk on," was the prompt reply.

A French lady, writing for girls on their behaviour in society, has summed up the matter in a terse and sensible sentence: "In order to be polite, be good." True politeness is more than "surface Christianity." If a man be a Christian gentleman, the fact will be known by his cat, his dog, his horse, his children, and every living being that comes in his way. To each and all he will display the gentler graces. Viewed in this light the highest kind of civility, means carrying into detail the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you."

THE FICTION COACH.

'WANTED, a Lady with some literary experience, to give instruction in the Art of Writing Fiction. No one who objects to a short residence in the country need apply. Address letter, stating qualifications and terms, to Alpha, May's Advertising Offices, Piccadilly."

Alethea Manners, sitting in a stuffy little room in a cramped little house at West Kensington, read this advertisement attentively, and then re-read it. It was a July day and very hot. Not a breath of air stirred the art-muslin curtains at the open window; the fox-terrier lay extended on the rug in an attitude of extreme exhaustion; even the musk on the window-ledge looked faint and languid. Alethea looked tired, although it was still early morning. She had been lying back listlessly in an easy-chair, turning the day's paper over and over; but when her eye suddenly caught the above-quoted lines, she sat up alertly and gave her mind to it.

She was a very pretty girl of four-and-twenty; her soft, fair hair, her rose-tinted complexion, her regular features, her slender form, were all that a girl's relations could wish her to possess; and, added to this mere prettiness, was a certain air of intellect which shone in her eyes and rested on her white brow.

The room in which she sat wore a look of refinement: the photographs on the walls were well chosen; there were shelves full of books; there was a bust of Shakespeare on a bracket; periodicals and pamphlets lay on the table. Nevertheless, there was also an unmistakable air of poverty about it: the decorations were faded; the carpet was worn; there were no dainty little novelties to be seen, no fresh crétonnes, no cut flowers, no books with Mudie's yellow or Smith's pink labels on their covers. It was easy to see that, before many months elapsed, it would be almost squalid.

It was the dread of this which had occupied Alethea's thoughts, as she idly fingered the newspaper.

She had looked round the little room, and everything that she looked at wanted renewing; yet how these things were to be renewed was a problem that she could not solve. Her mother's income was very small; recent illness had reduced to a minimum the balance at the bank; the daily expenses had to be met; Freddie's salary barely covered his season-ticket and his luncheons; Lucy could make puddings and the beds but not money; and she herself—Alethea, the talented girl, the clever one of the family—was a failure. Nobody had ever cast this terrible word in her teeth. The Mannerses were a gentle and affectionate family, and did not go out of their way to wound each other's feelings;

besides, the mother was still proud of the daughter whose effusions had been in print; and Freddie and Lucy, who adored their elder sister, had wide visions—not yet formulated into plans—of seizing every editor and publisher in London by the throat and compelling him, at the point of the bayonet, to own Alethea's merits and heap her with fame and riches. Only these misguided, short-sighted, wretched creatures stood between their sister and the position of a foremost writer of the day, they thought, and they felt quite sure that, if only Alethea could gain the ear of the public she would be at the top of the tree in a twinkling. Alethea felt this too, but she realised—what her fond relatives could not see—that with all her intellectual gifts, she did not possess that indefinable *je ne sais quoi* which does arrest and gain the public favour.

She had had her chances; at least three editors had accepted her stories, published them and paid for them. But with the cheques for three or four guineas her success had ended. Her little productions had fallen very flat. Her name was not buzzed about in literary circles; no publisher prostrated himself at her feet, imploring her for a three-volume novel; no editors besieged her for *feuilletons*. She had been spending money on pens, paper, ink, and postage for six years; she had accumulated a large trunkful of rejected MSS.; and she had earned about five pounds a year.

For some months Alethea had been seriously asking herself whether the game was worth the candle—whether, that is, the trouble and the disappointment and the expenditure in stamps and stationery were worth the meagre remuneration that dribbled in at such distant intervals.

She had long regarded herself as a failure; lately she had begun to consider herself as a hypocrite.

What right had she to pose as a literary person?—to sit for hours in a room alone, and demand tranquillity?—to keep her hands from pastry-making and stocking-darning, because it pleased her to cover quires of paper with fiction that no one wanted to read? Ought she not rather to be up and doing in some more lucrative sphere?

She felt this strongly, but, when one has the *mania scribendi*, it is not easy to choose another career. Alethea had no taste for nursing; she had no aptitude for teaching; she was too old for the Post Office; she had no money to enter into business. She had the artistic sense, the literary impulse, and that was all. If she gave up writing, she had nothing left to her.

Yet what was the good of writing—writing—writing—only to increase that hopeless pile of rejected MSS.?

For a week or more Alethea had done nothing—nothing but lounge in the shabby drawing-room, railing at fate when she was alone, pretending to read when any one came into the room. Mrs. Manners was surprised, but she attributed the girl's languor to the great heat, and made no comments. She had always been glad that Alethea,

who did not possess Lucy's practical turn for housekeeping, should have an absorbing occupation; but that Alethea viewed herself as a serious author she had never dreamed. It was nice, she thought, that Alethea should be able to make a little extra pocket-money for a muff, or a parasol, or a new hat; but it had never occurred to her that her daughter should have conceived the idea of supporting herself entirely by her pen. So she did not, like Mr. Burney, urge the girl to further efforts, but let her alone, sighing a little that she could not give her the change that she evidently needed.

But Alethea, whose debts amounted to twenty-two shillings, wanted money even more than change, and when she read Alpha's advertisement her eyes glistened.

"A lady of some literary experience," she murmured to herself. "Well, if experience is to be measured by quantity, mine is great, for I have written at least a thousand chapters. But, indeed, I have experience. Every one says there is nothing amateurish about my work. No one has ever found fault with my grammar, or called me vulgar, or criticised my details; and a great many people have praised my workmanship, though, as they phrase it, they have not seen their way to publishing it. Yes; at all events, my experience must be sufficient for any one who needs instruction in the Art of Fiction; and a change into the country would do me good—so here goes!"

Alethea was accustomed to act for herself. The profession that she had adopted, and in which she had failed, had at least taught her self-reliance; for she had had wit enough to perceive at the very commencement that literary advice is worth very little unless it is purchased, at a moderate cost of time, paper, and postage, from the only persons qualified to give it—viz., the editors of magazines and the publishers of new books.

Accordingly, she indited a well-expressed letter to Alpha, stating her qualifications, enumerating the periodicals in which her stories occasionally appeared, naming a modest remuneration, and finally announcing that she would be ready and delighted to take up her residence in the country at any time.

"I dare say it will never be answered," she thought, as she dropped the letter into the pillar-box with her own hand.

But it was answered. Everything comes to him who waits, and Alethea, who had failed as an author, suddenly found herself engaged as an Instructor of Authorship.

"It is quite too comic!" cried she. "Listen, mother! The letter is dated from the Manor House, Downton, and these are its contents:—'In reply to Miss Manners' letter, Lady de Vignerol begs to say that her daughter Isaline proposes to write a novel and seeks assistance in the task. Miss Manners' letter being so eminently pleasing, Lady de Vignerol is happy to engage her as Miss de Vignerol's instructress at a salary of fifty pounds a year, and will be

glad if Miss Manners can make it convenient to enter upon her duties upon an early day in the ensuing week.'"

* * * * *

When Alethea arrived at Downton Manor House, she was immediately ushered into the presence of Lady de Vignerol. The latter was a small and anxious-eyed lady, between forty and fifty, and, although she was richly dressed and all her surroundings were sumptuous, she did not look very cheerful.

"My daughter," she explained, when the first amenities were over, and Alethea was sipping a delicious tea that could not be afforded at West Kensington, "is keenly desirous of welcoming you; but, as it is necessary that I should put you *au fait* of the situation before you make her acquaintance, I ordered that you should be brought to my rooms in the first instance. There is a great future before Isaline, and my husband and I count upon your aid to realise it."

"Indeed, I will do my best," said Alethea. "But if Miss de Vignerol is so great a genius——"

"A genius!" cried the mother. "Isaline is no genius. She is completely matter-of-fact, incomparably empty of imagination. It is because we want her sentiments kindled, because we want whatever latent romance is in her to be fired, that we have decided she shall study the art of writing fiction. You will find her docile in all points but one, and it is this one point which we hope your instructions and influence may overcome. There is no time to be lost. Isaline's great destiny lies before her and must be shortly fulfilled—it *must* be fulfilled," said Lady de Vignerol impressively. "But her father and I should naturally prefer that it should be fulfilled gladly."

"Might I ask what Miss de Vignerol's destiny is?" inquired Alethea.

"Marriage," said the mother, solemnly.

"Does she not wish to marry?"

"She refuses to marry *him*, Miss Manners, her French cousin, the Marquis de Vignerolles, a handsome, gallant, charming young man of five-and-twenty. It is the darling wish of Sir Guy's heart that, in the persons of the two cousins, the ancient name and the large estates on either side of the Channel should be united. It will be your part, through your art, gently to persuade Isaline to undertake her sweet obligations. Her father wishes her to see the romance of the plan, to become sentimental about it, to grasp the idea and cherish it. He desires her to write a novel in order that her thoughts may be permeated with love. You will have to direct this novel, Miss Manners; you must find a romantic plot; you must invest it with sentiment; you must dictate the most burning conversations. We want Isaline to feed upon fiction of the most imaginative type, so that she may become what Sir Guy has always been—a child of romance."

For some seconds after this exordium, Alethea remained dumb. She was half inclined to ask that her luggage should be taken back instantly to the station; for how could she fulfil such difficult duties?

She had come prepared to write a novel, or to re-write some attempt at a novel already written by Miss de Vignerol; but she had not expected that it would be demanded of her to take the ordering of a girl's life into her hands. The responsibility seemed to her very heavy; but she was curious to see Isaline, and she checked the resignation which was trembling on her lips.

"Why will not Miss de Vignerol marry her cousin?" she presently inquired.

"She says she does not love him," replied the mother.

"But surely that is a romantic reason," said Alethea. "At least, we—we authors generally think so."

"Yes, Miss Manners; but circumstances alter cases, and the circumstances that surround the marriage projected for my daughter are of the most romantic kind. Imagine two brothers separating hundreds of years ago, one remaining in his native country, France, the other coming to England and becoming there a great man! That is what happened in Sir Guy's family. Now, with infinite pains he has sought out his French cousin, and has found him in the person of the rich, handsome, delightful young man I named to you just now. He and Isaline are the last descendants of this long race. What more romantic than that they should marry?"

"It is very interesting," said Alethea; "but of course I, like all writers of fiction, think that no true marriage can be founded on anything but personal affection."

"Yes, I believe that too," said Lady de Vignerol. "But cannot you by your art induce Isaline to love this man who has been discovered for her in so romantic a manner?"

Alethea was spared the necessity of answering this question by the entrance of Miss de Vignerol herself, and for the rest of that day nothing more was said concerning the Marquis de Vignerolles. Sir Guy, who shortly appeared, his wife and daughter, vied with each other in their efforts to amuse Alethea. They treated her as a most honoured guest; they entertained her with conversation, music and cards; Sir Guy put his stables at her disposal; Lady de Vignerol had apportioned for her use two of the pleasantest rooms in the house.

Isaline, like her mother, was *petite*, but there was no anxiety in her pretty, dark eyes, and she looked bright and happy. She was a brunette, with dazzling colour in her cheeks and lips, and tinges of chestnut-red in her dark hair. It was ridiculous, no doubt, but Alethea fancied that she could detect the distant French origin in the young English girl's appearance and vivacious manners. She felt drawn to her from the first, and she went guiltily to bed, feeling that if the necessity ever arose of taking sides with or against Isaline, her partisanship could not be accorded to the parents. She fell asleep thinking that her position was not unlikely to become embarrassed, and she awoke with the same thought in her mind. But it was not

until breakfast was over and Sir Guy had conducted her for a walk round the gardens that she realised how extremely difficult her relations with the parents and their child would probably turn out.

"Now, my dear Miss Manners, I must deprive myself of your society, for I see Isaline at her boudoir-window, and I am anxious that she should set to work under your able instructions as soon as possible," Sir Guy said. "My wife has, I believe, put the whole case before you."

"Yes," murmured Alethea; "but, Sir Guy, I—I don't know——"

"You are going to say you are not equal to the task?" said Sir Guy, kindly. "Miss Manners, I have read your stories, and I am convinced that you are fully equal to it. Isaline knows that it is my wish she should write a novel. During the writing of it, you will influence her as a writer of romance only can. You will so arrange the plot that she will be fascinated by the idea of the marriage I design for her. You will so build up the characters that she will think it more pleasing to bind together the dissevered branches of an ancient family than to marry for love. You will so round the dialogue that pride of race will become to her the most powerful of incentives. In short, you will so imbue her with the romantic elements of lineage, that she will come to value the preservation of her family, and the welding together of its long-dissociated branches as the first and best and most heroic object of her life. Miss Manners, I rely upon you to transform my child's mind," said Sir Guy, earnestly.

"Indeed, indeed!" faltered Alethea.

"Oh, you need not be alarmed," said Sir Guy, gaily. "We do not look for this transformation in a moment. Take your time. Only let your influence never cease. Now I will not detain you longer. You know the way to Isaline's boudoir? *Au revoir!*" And he lifted his hat and walked away, never doubting that Alethea saw the situation with his own eyes.

Alethea, however, went upstairs very heavy-hearted. She felt that she was in a false position; she felt that she had been deceived; she felt angry with Sir Guy and Lady de Vignerol; she felt provoked with herself for not having made stricter inquiries as to the duties that would be expected of her before accepting the post.

"I could have taught her to write grammatically, I could have given her a hundred plots," she said to herself. "But to interfere in the plot of her own life, how can I do that?"

She opened the door and was met by a smiling face. Isaline, who was sitting in the window at a table neatly spread with blotting-pads, paper, and various kinds of pens, jumped up and made a mock reverence.

"Dear lady, you are my coach, my fiction coach!" she cried. "Come and sit beside me and divulge to me a plot. Or stay! As an exercise, let me give you the outlines of a plot and you shall tell me how it strikes you. *Imprimis*,—Lorenzo is a son of Adam, and

Sacharissa is a daughter of Eve. Isn't that a good beginning, something after the manner of Fielding? *Secundo*,—Adam wishes Lorenzo and Sacharissa to marry, so that the possession of both hemispheres may be kept in the family. But *thirdly*,—the young people won't obey; and *fourthly*—my dear Miss Manners," said the lively girl, "*fourthly* is the *dénoûment*, and that shall be planned by your experience. Come! Given, two perverse young people and two obstinate old ones, what will be the probable result?"

Alethea tried to look grave, but she could not forbear laughing.

"You mustn't be giddy," she said. "I am here on a very delicate mission, and I rely on your goodness of heart to render my task easy and pleasant. Miss de Vignerol——"

"Call me Isaline, and let me call you Alethea!"

"Very well. To begin with, Isaline——"

There was a long pause.

"To begin with, let us have a short conversation on domestic affairs generally, and my own in particular," said Isaline. "My parents have of course informed you of the high destiny they have in store for me? Very well. Destiny is good, but it is like marriage; there is the marriage you ought to make, and the marriage you do make. So there is the destiny you ought to accomplish, and the destiny you do accomplish. To bring generalities to a point, no doubt my cousin Hugo and I ought to wed; it is a pretty idea, the sentiment is delightful; the romance of the whole thing is fascinating. But the two principal factors are unfortunately against it; the proposed bride and bridegroom refuse to enact their parts. The riddle is: What are you going to do with them?"

"Why don't you like the Marquis de Vignerolles?" asked Alethea.

"I do like him, immensely. I love him dearly," replied Isaline. "But unhappily, poor papa introduced him too young. He hunted him up when I was nine and Hugo was thirteen. We became brother and sister on the spot, and brother and sister we have ever since remained. I daresay, if I had seen him now for the first time, I should have fallen in love with him, for he is delightful; but you will allow that a girl can't fall in love with her brother."

"But he is not your brother, Isaline!"

Isaline shrugged her shoulders. "We don't mean to marry," she said, conclusively.

After this, Alethea took the earliest opportunity of telling Lady de Vignerol that she was quite sure she should never be able to influence Isaline, and that she considered therefore that her immediate duty was to return home. But neither Lady de Vignerol nor Sir Guy would hear of this proceeding. It was too early days for so prompt a decision, they said; influence must always be gradual and indirect; as Isaline grew to value her companion's society, she would more readily accept her opinions; besides, the writing of the novel would do

wonders. After all, Isaline's novel was Miss Manners' object, and the novel would surely be the vehicle of the good and romantic ideas with which Isaline's mind was to be primed.

And naturally the poor little failure from West Kensington yielded. Everything at Downton Manor House was so good, the large cool rooms, the beautiful gardens, the old pony she rode, the carriages in which she drove about the country, the well-trained, admirable servants, even the poultry and the cream and the fruit, that Alethea could not make up her mind to relinquish it. So she stayed on and on, and made great way with a novel; but she did not influence Isaline in the least, and though Isaline always sat in the room reading or embroidering, not a paragraph or a sentence of the novel did she compose, not a single idea in it originated from her, not even the names of the characters were her invention.

As is the wont of writers, Alethea soon became engrossed in her work, and carried it on with enthusiasm; but unfortunately, the book —it is a tendency that novels have—would write itself, and, notwithstanding Alethea's efforts, her plot refused to arrange itself after the fashion that Sir Guy intended, and her characters would not fall into the grooves that he would have dictated. As each chapter was concluded, Alethea read it aloud to Isaline, and Isaline was delighted with it. But it had nothing to do with Isaline's marriage with Hugo de Vignerolles, and Alethea was vexed.

"I meant it to be so different," she would sigh.

"My dear, it is charming," Isaline would rejoin.

But Alethea was not happy, and when the autumn drew on, she seriously contemplated going home.

"I have been here nearly three months, and I have done nothing your father or mother wish or expect," she said. "Darrell has forgotten that he is the next heir to Strangelands; he cares for nothing but political ambition, he has left Phebe to her rural solitude and he has fallen in love with Clemence."

"Which is far more natural," put in Isaline.

"But which I ought not to have allowed," said the author. "Indeed, I don't know how it happened. I made a rough sketch of the whole story before I begun, but somehow it went off at a tangent in the very first chapter. Why did Darrell say, 'Love, unqualified by circumstances, is the only thing worth living for?' I never intended him to say it; I meant him to say: 'The honour of an old name surpasses even love itself!' But I lost control over my puppet before I had written a thousand words. It is exceedingly provoking. I believe that is why I have never succeeded. I can't write what I know would answer. When I dip my pen in the ink, it writes, not I."

It was a mild October afternoon, and the two girls were walking homewards through a lane that was lovely with red and yellow leaves; a golden haze seemed to fill the atmosphere; a robin sang cheerily in

the hedge; somewhere, out of sight, a young man was whistling blithely; Isaline laughed merrily at her friend's plaint; everything was serene, except Alethea's troubled conscience.

"It is all very well for you to laugh," she said, in a faltering voice. "You are not being paid fifty pounds a year to do the very reverse of what you are doing."

"My dear girl," begun Isaline eagerly.

But before she could say a word more, there came suddenly round the corner, a gentleman—a young man with the beautiful face and the elegant appearance of the proverbial prince in the fairy-tale.

"Isaline! My cousin!" he exclaimed.

"My dear Hugo!" cried Isaline.

They clasped hands, and looked frankly into each other's eyes, and a few rapid sentences as to Hugo's unexpected arrival passed between them. In a moment, Alethea perceived intuitively that these two would never love as it is seemly that a bride and bridegroom should love, and she made up her mind that, in spite of anything that Sir Guy and Lady de Vignerol might say, she would go home the next day. She walked slowly on, thinking rather regretfully of the pleasant time that had slipped by so quickly, and was now at an end, and she felt a little resentful against Darrell. Darrell was her own creature; he had been engaged for a certain purpose; nay, he had been called into existence to assist in a conspiracy, and lo! the ungrateful fellow had turned Queen's evidence at the very outset, and had done nothing but show that the conspiracy was based on false and foolish reasoning.

"No wonder I have made such a poor thing of authorship, since I can't even manage my own characters!" she thought bitterly.

Meantime, when she had gone on a little way, Hugo turned with eagerness to his cousin. He was a pleasing creature to look at, with his easy manners, his graceful gestures, his smiling *bonhomie*, his expressive eyes, that could melt with tenderness, and shine with fun, and transfix another person with gravity. It was not wonderful that Sir Guy should desire him as a son-in-law; but unfortunately, in England, a man's son-in-law must be chosen for him by his daughter, and the most docile daughter sometimes proves herself disagreeable in this matter of choosing a son-in-law for her papa. In this instance, moreover, the refractory daughter was aided and abetted by the desired son-in-law, and Sir Guy would indeed have been sorely vexed had he been within sound of Hugo's earnest voice.

"Who is she?" asked the young man, with a pretty foreign accent.

"She is my fiction coach," replied Isaline mischievously.

"She is your—I beg your pardon, Isaline,—she is your what?" said Hugo, with a perplexed air.

"Hugo, do you pretend to know English like an Englishman, and you don't know what a coach is?" said Isaline.

"My dear cousin, I do know. A coach is a kind of *voiture*, and

when you speak slang, it is a person who prepares another person to pass an examination."

"Very good. I at this moment speak slang."

Hugo looked more mystified still.

"But fiction! How can you be prepared in fiction? And that lovely girl, too!"

"Hugo, that lovely girl is an author. She writes fiction, and she is employed by my parents to teach me to write fiction."

"For what object?" inquired the young man.

"For papa's object. He supposes that a course of novel-writing will romantically incline my heart to you, dear sir!" said Isaline, stopping in the middle of the road to make him a curtsey.

"Is that it?" said Hugo. "My dear cousin, you know you have only to say the word. As I have told you already, if you wish it, I will marry you to-morrow."

"Thanks! But you know, Hugo, I don't wish it. Neither do you."

"Far be it from me to express myself so bluntly, Isaline."

"That is your French politeness, and it doesn't please me one little bit. I liked it much better when you said, in a great English voice: 'By Jove, doesn't the prayer-book say, *A man may not marry his sister?*'"

Hugo laughed pleasantly—a ringing, musical laugh, that reached Alethea's ears. "I wonder what they are talking about?" she said to herself.

"Very well, my cousin, we will put that question aside, as usual," Hugo went on. "At all events, for the present. Meantime, I will join the fiction classes; I will place myself under the instructions of the fiction coach. It is no use romantically to influence only one of us, and Sir Guy ought to have summoned me directly he inaugurated these fiction lessons."

Isaline laughed and clapped her hands and then ran to overtake her friend.

"Alethea," she cried breathlessly, "do stop and let me introduce my cousin to you. The Marquis de Vignerolles—Miss Manners. A new pupil for you, my dear. Hugo wishes to join your fiction classes."

"May I?" asked Hugo, who stood before the blushing fiction coach, hat in hand, the golden glory of the sinking sun lighting up his fine countenance.

"You are very kind," said Alethea, in some confusion; "but I mean to go home to-morrow."

Hugo's face fell.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Isaline. "Go home to-morrow! Why, you have hardly gained any influence over me yet!"

"And I never shall, Isaline; that is the very reason. I am sure Monsieur de Vignerolles will see that it is not honourable of me——"

"Oh, stuff!" cried Isaline. "Hugo will take his turn, and you will find him a much apter pupil, for he is extremely romantic. Go home to-morrow! I couldn't hear of such a thing."

"Just as I have arrived too," said Hugo plaintively. "It would strike a poor foreigner a blow the most cruel."

* * * * *

Somehow Alethea was induced to stay, and every day Hugo attended what he was pleased to call the fiction class in Isaline's boudoir. But after his arrival the novel did not progress fast. Alethea pathetically pointed out to the new scholar that Darrell was not doing, and could not by any means be persuaded to do, his duty, and Hugo agreed with her and gave her his warmest sympathy, and discussed with her all the nicest points on the subject of honourable conduct, and how far a person was justified in receiving money for not doing what was expected of her. And it is wonderful what interest these and kindred subjects are found to possess when the argument is carried on between two handsome young people of opposite sexes. Isaline listened to it all, and occasionally said her say, but the others did not listen to her much. They were abundantly occupied with each other, and sometimes Isaline went away and left them to themselves, laughing in her naughty little heart.

"I tell you what, Miss Manners," said Hugo, on one of these occasions, "you are not fit for this business. I mean, you are too *spirituelle* to make your way as an author. Authors should be strong, coarse, combative men. A lady can't contend—at least, not a lady like you; and authors must contend and fight and push to be successful. You must give it up," said the young man, with conviction.

"But, if I give it up, what am I to do?" demanded Alethea, her lip quivering. "I have no other means of earning a halfpenny."

"But why should you want to earn a halfpenny?"

"Why? Oh, Monsieur de Vignerolles, I can't tell you why. There are many reasons. For one, I want to be rich."

"A very proper ambition. But why not be rich in a nicer way?"

"There is no nicer way for me," said poor Alethea, with difficulty swallowing the tears that rose, she knew not why. "I am not adapted to any other kind of work."

"But why should you work?" demanded the young Frenchman. "You English ladies are so full of work—as if work were the right thing for your little hands. Oh, I know you are the cleverest nation of women in the world, but I have been brought up to think men should do the work while the ladies sit at home, graceful and gracious. They can be clever in a different way. There is the organisation of the *ménage*, the conversation of the *salon*—all this is in the lady's hands. Why try to do things you are not calculated to do?"

"But you don't understand," said Alethea. "I have no father, and my brother is quite young. I must work."

"But there is another relation," said Hugo eagerly. "There is

the husband, and he ought to be better than either father or brother. Oh, Miss Manners, I don't exactly know how these things are done in England, but if you would give me encouragement, if you would tell me how I may approach Madame, your mother, and where she resides, I——"

And then Isaline opened the door.

"You naughty people!" she cried. "The luncheon-bell has rung, and I don't believe you have washed your hands."

So this important colloquy was interrupted, and Alethea fled to her room trembling, frightened, elated, ashamed, and yet happy—oh, so happy! She was very silent at luncheon and ate little, and when they rose from table, she excused herself from the drive that had been planned on the plea of a head-ache, and she retired to her room and allowed Isaline to pity her and put eau-de-Cologne on her forehead and move about on tip-toe, while all the time she was singing a little tender refrain in her heart, "He loves me, he loves me! I shall never see him again, but he loves me!"

Then, when the driving-party had gone out she arose, packed her boxes, and, leaving them ready to be sent after her and a note on Isaline's table, she slipped away to the railway-station and took the train for London.

And by the time she reached West Kensington, all her elation and happiness had departed, and she was in the lowest spirits and very wretched. For she loved Hugo from the bottom of her heart, and she felt sure that Sir Guy would never let her meet him again. Moreover, she felt that, however unintentionally, she had acted treacherously, and that the fiasco that had occurred was somehow her doing. She had been as bad as Darrell; Darrell had been requisitioned to prove that the union of a long-divided family was the most romantic thing on the whole, and he had absolutely declined to be moulded at the dictate of his creator, but had declared that political ambition was dearer to him than any family consideration, and had insisted on falling in love in the wrong direction; and she, who had been brought to Downton Manor House solely to urge Isaline to fall in love with her cousin, had instead fallen in love with him herself.

It was disgraceful, it was shameful, it was more humiliating than all the rebuffs that all the editors and publishers had poured upon her devoted head! At that moment, as Alethea travelled to town in a third-class carriage, she felt that the most entire ill-success in literature could not hurt her so acutely as the pricks of her own conscience which impressed upon her that she had acted disgracefully.

They received her at West Kensington with open arms, for she was their pride and their darling, and they had missed her much, and she tried to be cheerful for their sakes, though she said frankly that she could not explain why she had come home so suddenly.

"I will tell you some day, mother," she said. And Mrs. Manners did not press her further.

But perhaps the mother had guessed, being a very sagacious woman. At all events, when the Marquis de Vignerolles dashed to the door in a hansom the next morning and sent in his card to Mrs. Manners, that lady went into the shabby little drawing-room to receive him with perfect composure, although the rest of the household was convulsed with astonishment. I think that Mrs. Manners' heart did beat fast when Hugo, after the French fashion, formally asked her for her daughter's hand in marriage; but that was for Alethea's sake. What mother is not overjoyed when a delightful young man, who is also wealthy, petitions for the honour of marrying her child?

As for Alethea, she remonstrated sturdily and did her utmost to send her lover away rejected; but he eventually contrived to smooth away all her self-reproach, and when Isaline arrived after lunch, Alethea and Hugo were engaged.

"I feel so ashamed," Alethea said. "I shall never be able to look Sir Guy in the face again."

But she did. For Sir Guy, to do him justice, was philosopher enough not to kick against the inevitable, and when Isaline told him that the one bitter drop in Alethea's cup was her fear that she had acted a traitor's part, he went to see his kinsman's bride and assured her that, except Isaline, he could have wished no other wife for Hugo.

"Certainly," said Lucy, as she arranged her sister's beautiful wedding-presents, "there are great prizes to be obtained in literature!"

"If you are lucky enough to become a fiction coach," Alethea added.

She still maintains that she was a failure; but she has other things to do now, and in them she shines.

FAYR MADOC.

WAS IT A DREAM?

MANY years ago, in that Old Kensington which has been so charmingly described by Miss Thackeray, there lived two lovers. *She* was the daughter of a stern old general rolling in wealth—*he*, a poor cavalry captain with nothing but his pay. No need to tell the sequel! Rich men in those days, though they may be called the "good old times," had no more sympathy with penniless young men who came a-wooing to their daughters than they have now. This particular one, though his money might have made his daughter and her lover "happy ever after," was not inclined to spend it in such a way. He had set his heart on marrying her to a lord, and in that case would settle enough on her to buy a king's ransom. But he was not going to enrich a young man who had nothing of his own, nor did he mean to help his daughter to throw herself away. So when Captain Lennox called to ask him for his consent to his marriage with Jeanne, he pretty quickly got his *congé*, and was told that young men in the army with no private fortune should seek for a wife in the Union. It was very insulting, no doubt, but then the General was greatly roused, and also —he had the gout.

A sorrowful interview followed between the lovers (for they found a meeting-place). "Is it then so very bad, Jamie, that you think papa will not relent?" asked the tearful Jeanne.

"I fear so, my darling," answered the lover; "but tell me, would you have the courage to marry me at once? I don't care for the money one straw; I would sell out, and get something to do, and we might be happy yet."

This was wrong, perhaps, in the Captain, but he was very much in love, and really wanted the girl for her own sweet sake alone. But Jeanne would not listen to his suggestion. She had strict ideas about obeying one's father, learned from her French mother. When that mother knew she was leaving her child for ever in this world, she said to her: "Whatever you do, *ma chérie*, never disobey your father; that is wicked, and would only bring evil on you." Through the ten years which had passed away since that sad time, the girl had always remembered her gentle mother's words, and her stern father had found her obedience perfect. Even now, clinging to her lover and sobbing as if her heart would break, she did not fail.

"I cannot go away with you," she said; "if my father forbids, that would be doing wrong, and I *cannot* do wrong. We must wait for better times."

"The times never will be better," he cried. "Listen, Jeanne. I know your father means to marry you to Lord Cremlyn, and if we say good-bye now, it will be for ever—can you bear that?" But the

girl was firm in her resolution: "I cannot disobey my father." They did part, and it was, as he said, "for ever."

Years passed away, and in their passing brought many changes. The General had his way and married Jeanne to Lord Cremlyn. Before she consented to be engaged she told her future husband all —how she could "never, never care for any one as she had cared for Captain Lennox."

"Never mind that, Jeanne," replied her new lover. "I know all about it, and in time I feel sure I shall be able to make you happy."

And so he did. It is true that Lady Cremlyn never cared for him in the same way that she had cared for Captain Lennox, but she had a gentle disposition and not a very strong character. She was moreover true to the core, and since "Papa wished her to marry Lord Cremlyn," she supposed she must love him. So she put away with a sigh the old romance, and turned to her new duties as she was bidden, and the General congratulated himself that he had so good a daughter.

The separation did far more harm to Captain Lennox than to Jeanne. He had a deep tenacious nature which could not love in that direction which was most convenient. For awhile he suffered terribly. Indeed, he never ceased to suffer, for Jeanne was the one woman in the world to him.

But gradually the bright, open-hearted young soldier grew bitter and worldly-wise, and he determined that if he could not have love, he would at any rate secure comfort. So he watched his opportunity, and at last it came to him in the shape of an orphan girl in India, a great heiress, who was just about to return to England in her sorrow. She was easily won, and now Captain Lennox was as rich as the old General himself. He retired from the army, and settled down in an Indian home, where he grew richer and richer till he was able to live like a prince. Children were born to him—he was called a happy and fortunate man. His wife thought otherwise; to her he never seemed quite content, and she could not understand it—had he not everything that heart could wish? Ah, she knew nothing of the heartache which day by day pursued him, do what he would to chase it away; she little guessed the weary longing for a glimpse of one face which he never must see again in this world. Happiness seemed to him far away, rest was not to be bought, even with a princely fortune—could he then be called "fortunate"?

Captain Lennox was a good man, and though the thought of Jeanne was an ever present one to him, he had made no effort to see her since she had become the wife of another. Even when he married, he chose India as his home, as they were less likely to meet there; by-and-by no doubt he would be able to forget, and for this he made a brave, faithful struggle.

But before this good fight ended in victory (would he ever have won it on earth?) a messenger came who could not be refused, the

Angel of Death. Suddenly the "fortunate" man was struck down by an epidemic, and quickly became a victim to the fell disease. "I'm going, dear," he said to his wife; "I've tried to be a good husband to you—tell me, have you been happy?"

"Oh very, very happy," she sobbed; "but sometimes, James, I fear *you* have not been so."

"Dear, that was not your fault," he replied. "Once, before I knew you, I had a very great sorrow; and I never quite got over it. It would have done you no good to know it, or perhaps I might have told you. But don't fret about that—it's all over now! You've been a true, good wife to me—kiss me, and say good-bye."

Not long after this, while Mrs. Lennox thought her husband sleeping, she heard him cry "Jeanne!" She fancied he wanted his youngest child, who had been called by that name, and was his great pet. She went to fetch her. When she returned with the child, her husband lay with outstretched arms, and a happy smile on his face; but his spirit had passed away.

After this Mrs. Lennox made her home in England. It was her husband's express wish that she should do so, for, as he said, India was not the best place for girls, and he should like all his children to have an English education. We need only to follow the history of his eldest son—that of the others was in no way remarkable.

Meanwhile, in the beautiful home of Lord and Lady Cremlyn, a little daughter, called by the sweet name of Faith, was growing up to rejoice her mother's heart. All the elder children had been boys, and this one fair little girl was prized beyond measure by her parents. She was her mother's constant companion, and one day, turning over an old desk of hers, commenting in her pretty way over each treasure found therein, she came across a faded picture of an officer in uniform. Something in the face attracted her attention, and she carried the miniature to Lady Cremlyn.

"Who's this, darling mummie?" she asked. "It isn't a gentleman I've ever seen here!"

The mother bent over her little daughter as she said:

"Ah, Faithie, my pet, that is an old friend of mine who is dead now!"

"Dead, mummie, is he? Oh, I'm so sorry! I like him, and I wanted to see him. May I have his picture? I'll take *such* care of it!"

"Yes, my darling," replied the mother, "you may have it, and you may love him, too; for once he loved mummie very much."

Little Faith kissed the picture, and carried it away to hang up in her room, and Lady Cremlyn pondered wonderingly over the child's fancy.

II.

It is night, and in a clearing in the midst of an Indian jungle, a white tent is pitched. Dark forms lie sleeping around it, horses are tethered, and fires are burning to keep off unpleasant nocturnal visitors. The stars are shining out in the heavens above—it is a most lovely night. Let us take a glance inside the tent. One man, an Englishman evidently, lies stretched there. He is fast asleep, and dreaming of home. Suddenly he stirs, looks up bewildered, and seems about to speak—again he is silent. Now he gets up, puts on his outer garments, and comes quietly out of the tent. He glances around on the sleepers, then hurriedly he walks away to the place where one of the horses is tethered. A whisper wakes it, then in perfect stillness he saddles it and rides away. On, on, on, all night he rides, till at last at dawn of day he reaches a British military encampment. Here he dismounts, tethers his horse, and walks unceremoniously into one of the tents. He knows that his friend, who sleeps there, will be astonished to see him, but he is not prepared for the effect produced when, by a slight touch, he wakes him. Instead of the surprise and pleasure he expects to see on the face looking into his, abject terror is depicted there. The man shrinks back, his teeth chattering, his whole form quivering with terror.

"Why, Beamer, old man," cries the new-comer, "what in the world's the matter? Are you ill, or do you take me for a ghost?"

For all reply, Beamer bursts into tears, seizes his hand, shakes it over and over again, and when at last he finds voice, says:

"Oh, Jimmy, my dear old fellow, you don't know how glad I am to set eyes on you again! We all thought you were dead! Did the brutes let you go, then?"

"Let me go! What on earth are you talking about? You thought I was dead, did you? Well, I *have* had a very curious experience, but I'm not dead—far from it!"

"So I see! Well, just let me get up, and we'll have some coffee and a smoke, and I'll tell you a pretty queer story. Prepare yourself for a shock!"

The two friends were soon seated with their coffee and its adjuncts, and while they were enjoying it "Beamer" told the following story.

"You know, Jimmy, the Colonel was not altogether easy about your going up country with only three natives—it's one of his theories that they are not to be trusted. However, you would have it so, and there was no more to be said. You started off on Monday. Well, on Tuesday, middle day, that wretch Abdallah was caught stealing again. We thought we'd give him a pretty good fright this time, so we trotted him out before the chief, and stood all round him, pretending we were

going to shoot him. We did just scare him, and were on the point of leaving him, thinking we had punished him enough, when, to our surprise, he fell down on his knees before the Colonel and said that if only we would spare his life, he could tell something that might save you from death. Of course the chief was all ears at once. Well, the wretch told us that he had heard those three brutes who had gone with you plotting to murder and rob you in the jungle, and then make off. In reply to the question why he had not at once told this, he drew his hand across his throat, as much as to say they would have killed him too if he had. But it's my belief he meant to be in the swim himself—you can never get to the bottom of these fellows. Of course we lost no time; the chief and a lot of us started off at once on your track, for as you were to be three days on your journey, we hoped we might reach you before it was too late. But when we got near to your first halting-place, we met some fellows who had travelled by your route, only the opposite way, and they told us a story of how they had come upon the body of an Englishman, murdered evidently, further along the way; so of course we gave you up for lost. We could do nothing for you, for these fellows said they had buried the body, and we came back again, the chief vowing vengeance on the men who had murdered you, and saying he'd hunt them out all over India, if need be. And now I should like to know what brings you here alive. You certainly were not meant to be in the flesh by this time! I'm all impatience to hear *your* story, Lennox!"

Captain Lennox (for it was the son of our old friend) hesitated; then seeing the other's surprise he said: "Well, Beamer, if you'll give me your solemn word of honour not to repeat what I say, I'll tell you the story. I'm not sure if you will believe it; I'm not even sure if I believe it myself; but I'm certain the other fellows would not. You promise—then here goes!

"When I left on Monday I did not take the route intended: those rascals pointed out to me that the other was better, and I, not having the least suspicion of them, gave in. I suppose the fact was that the other is less frequented, and there was not much danger of our meeting others. We went slowly and halted often, for it was awfully hot. I got on all right, the men were as civil as possible, and the third night I lay down in my tent feeling that I was half-way through the journey, and should soon be with my friends. I don't think I had been long asleep when something woke me, and to my astonishment there stood, bending over me, a beautiful girl. I thought I was still dreaming, rubbed my eyes, sat up, and fancied she would vanish, but no—there she stood with an anxious look in her eyes which I could not make out. I was about to speak, and see whether my voice would dispel the lovely apparition, when she made a motion, as if to enjoin silence, and I could not find my voice. Then she pointed to the door of the tent, and began to move out. I found myself following her. She glided to the spot where my horse lay tethered, and

motioned me to saddle him. I did so. Her lips seemed to form the word 'mount,' I obeyed. Then with a look of satisfaction she moved away, beckoning me to follow. Through the whole night she never stopped, and my horse seemed to have wings for we retraced in a few hours what had taken us two days of our journey to accomplish. I had no idea where I was going, no thought of where she might lead me, only I knew I *must* follow her. At last I recognised our tents, and knew that I had come back to you. I looked for my guide—she was gone—vanished. I thought for a moment I had been dreaming all the time, but there was your tent straight in front of me. I said to myself I would give you a surprise, but I never meant to breathe to any living soul *why* I had come back. Beamer, my dear boy, what in the world is the meaning of it all?"

Captain Drury (otherwise Beamer) leaned forward eagerly as he said: "Well, Lennox, there's not much religion about me, I'm afraid, but all I can say is, your escape is nothing short of a miracle. The girl was an angel, of course, and was sent to save you."

"But why—why, should she save me like that? I could understand it if I'd been very good, and all that, you know, but I've been such a wild chap."

"Well, Lennox, I'm not the sort to preach a sermon, but I think you ought to be different after this, I do indeed: your life must have been saved for something. Perhaps your mother is a good woman and prays for you. I know mine does."

A few minutes after, the whole camp was astir with the news that the dead man had come to life again. Hand-shakings and congratulations were the order of the day, and no one would have imagined that any serious thought had ever been in the mind of the gay young captain. But one thought stuck there, all the same.

"And now," said the major, "we shall see Beamer look like himself again; his jolly old face has been as long as a fiddle since we heard that Jimmy was to be put out of the way. That's right, my boy, beam away," as a broad grin spread over the round rubicund face of Captain Drury.

No one but the Colonel and Beamer ever heard the true story of Captain Lennox's deliverance. The others were told that he had had a mysterious warning that his life was in danger, and that, taking advantage of the sleep of his would-be murderers, he had made good his escape.

III.

It was a lovely morning in May, and at Cremlyn Castle the household was early astir, for it was the twenty-first birthday of the youngest and best beloved inmate, the Lady Faith. There was no one, far or near, uninterested in this event, for by rich and poor, old and young the girl was almost worshipped. No wonder! Her whole life was

spent in doing things for others, herself entirely forgotten. Unobtrusively she went about her work—a flower here, a message there, a visit to one, a kind word to another—little things these, but life is made up of littles, and so many forget this fact altogether. While striving to make great sacrifices or to do great kindnesses upon which all the world may look and comment, they fail in the small acts of love which win hearts, and bring blessing on the doer of them. Faith was great in small things. A verse she often quoted as describing a truly womanly character, might have been written of herself:—

> "She doeth little kindnesses
> Which most despise or leave undone:
> For nought that sets the heart at ease,
> Or giveth happiness or peace,
> Is light esteemèd in her eyes."

From her power of intense sympathy, all this came easy to Faith, and though her beauty won admiration, it was her loving heart which gained devotion.

To-day there was to be a fête in her honour, and the whole neighbourhood was bidden to it. Near her place at the breakfast table lay a whole heap of presents surmounted by a most beautiful bouquet of lilies of the valley—her favourite flowers.

Father, mother, brothers, and guests were all assembled in the breakfast-room, waiting for the household darling to appear.

"What makes the child so late, I wonder?" said Earl Cremlyn to his wife; "she is generally up with the lark."

"She sat up so late last night, discussing to-day's arrangements that she has overslept herself," laughed Lord Darlow, the eldest son. "I will go and hurry her," and off he went. He soon returned, consternation in every feature.

"Mother, darling, I don't want to frighten you, but I met Faith's maid, and she says she cannot waken her. Will you go to her? There must be something wrong, I'm afraid."

Lady Cremlyn hurriedly left the room, followed by her husband. Her sons and friends hastily discussed what could be the matter. One suggested a sleeping draught. "Bosh!" said Lord Darlow; "Faith never took such a thing in her life." Another thought it was perhaps an over-dose of medicine. "And she never wanted any medicine either," he retorted.

Meanwhile, Lady Cremlyn, much alarmed, was bending over her daughter's bed. She called her by name, there was no movement. She raised her up, but the girl fell heavily back to her former posture. "This is serious," cried Lord Cremlyn; "the doctor must at once be sent for. Take the carriage, and bring him back with you."

In less than a quarter of an hour the family physician was standing by the still unconscious girl. Her face was perfectly colourless, her hands rigid. Suddenly, before the doctor had time to use any remedies, she opened her eyes.

"*Is he safe?*" she gasped.

"Safe! Who?" said Lord Cremlyn, in amazement; but at a sign from the doctor he was silent.

The kind physician took the girl's hand, saying: "Yes, quite safe, my child; and see, now you must take this," giving her a strong restorative. Afterwards he sat by her side, administering nourishment from time to time until at last she fell into a quiet natural sleep. Then, leaving the mother with her child, he sought the anxious father.

"She will do now, I think; but you must watch her with the utmost care, and if she stirs, give her nourishment. I will be here again within an hour."

"Have you any idea as to the cause of this sudden seizure?" asked Lord Cremlyn. "She has never had a day's illness in her life before as you know."

"No; it is wholly unaccountable. She has all the appearance of having passed through a tremendous mental and physical strain. That, as far as we know, is impossible, but she is of a highly nervous and sympathetic temperament, and it may be that she has dreamed something which has strangely affected her. We are hardly aware of how much may happen to us in our sleep. She will need the greatest care for months to come." And so saying, the doctor departed.

There was of course the greatest consternation when the serious illness of Lady Faith became known. The birthday festivities were all postponed; the guests sorrowfully left the Castle, and everywhere there was gloom instead of the expected great joy.

For days Faith lay quietly in her bed, sleeping, for the most part, and always very still. She felt no pain, she said when questioned, she was "only tired." There was now no cause for alarm, the doctor said, but her strength must be kept up, and every one must be very cheery with her. Slowly, slowly, she recovered in a measure, and was at last able to sit up in a chair in her room. One day she said to her mother: "Mummie dear, it was strange, was it not, about my illness?"

"Yes, indeed, darling; no one can throw the slightest light on any cause for it. You went to bed perfectly well, and then we found you in that awful state in the morning."

"It was *very* strange," Faith repeated dreamily. "You will think me very foolish, mother, when I tell you I believe it was a dream or vision of some kind that made me ill. I remember I went to sleep thinking that the eyes of my 'hero,' as you call Captain Lennox's picture, were looking at me. Then it seemed to me I heard a voice crying, 'Save him! oh, save him!' and some one replied, 'He shall be saved.' After that I thought I went on a long long journey to a foreign country. I saw trees that never grow in England or in any place abroad where we have ever been. Then in total darkness, I seemed to be running in a sort of wood where the ground was very rough, and all the time I heard a horse galloping behind me. I was, oh, so fearfully tired, mummie, when I saw a most lovely sunrise,

yellow and green and red all mixed, and in the distance were white tents on which the light fell, and painted them all kinds of colours. Then I thought I heard a voice telling me that my work was done, and I might go home again, and I don't remember any more till I woke and saw you looking at me *so* anxiously, dear old mummie."

"My darling, it was all a dream, and you must try not to think of it any more, but make haste and get well."

"Yes, but, mother, you know I did feel most awfully tired for days, and you told me the first thing I said when I woke was, 'Is he safe?' It seems as if there was something real as well as unreal about it," said the girl thoughtfully.

"Well, darling, I want you to forget it all now. There is no doubt that the night before your birthday you were over-tired and excited, and that made you weary. I think I shall have to take away your hero, who was once *my* hero, if he makes you dream, Faithie. My darling daughter drove all thoughts of heroes out of my head long ago," and the mother laid her face against her child's soft cheek, and fondly kissed her.

Faith returned the caress, and pleaded, "Oh, no, mother, please don't take Captain Lennox away, and I will promise you never to dream any more."

IV.

A YEAR had passed away since Lady Faith's strange illness, and Lord and Lady Cremlyn were in Guernsey with their daughter. She had never quite recovered her usual spirits, and the doctor had recommended a perfect change as the best cure. Plans had been discussed, many places abroad suggested for their sojourn, but, as Faith said, she wanted something quite new.

"I have it, father," cried Lord Donald one morning; "why don't you go to Guernsey? I have heard glowing accounts of it from fellows who have been there, and it will certainly be different from anything you have seen before."

So to Guernsey they went, and Faith soon felt she could stay in the little sea-girt isle for ever. Did one ever see such exquisite colouring in rocks and sea at any other place? Such fairy scenery, one would have thought, existed only in the land of dreams! The old market, the beautiful town church, the women with their quaint polite manners, seemed to make up a harmonious whole, which was infinitely resting. Faith quickly recovered from the nervous depression which had weighed on her, and became once more the bright lively girl of a year ago.

Lord and Lady Cremlyn drove all over the island, accompanied sometimes by their daughter; but more often, with her maid as a companion, Faith would wander over the cliffs and then down to one of the numerous little bays which fringe the shore, there to read, or sketch,

or just to feast her eyes on the lovely stretch of scenery before her. One day, returning from an excursion, she found her mother quite excited.

"Faith, darling," she cried, "we have had a most pleasant surprise. We met General Hutchinson this afternoon, and he introduced us to the son of a very old friend, no less a friend than the Captain Lennox whose picture you treasure so much. I was almost startled at first by the likeness to his father—it was like seeing one risen from the dead His regiment has lately come home from India, and is stationed here. He is a most charming young man, and I have asked him to call."

Lord Cremlyn smiled at his wife's excitement. He was not in the least jealous of her old love; he knew her whole heart now belonged to him.

"It is quite a romantic episode, is it not?" he said. "A fairy Prince for the Fairy Island, as you call it—eh, Faithie?"

The bright colour came into Faith's cheeks. This was an interesting story indeed. She had thought and dreamed so much of Captain Lennox the elder, and now, how delightful to see some one who had really belonged to him. She wondered impatiently when he would come. She had not long to wait. A day or two afterwards, returning from her afternoon walk, she caught sight of a fair-headed stranger, sitting in the bow-window of the hotel, talking to her mother. This then was the expected guest. Faith took off her walking dress, and then with hesitation unwonted to her went down to the drawing-room. When she entered, Captain Lennox's head was turned away from the door, but at Lady Cremlyn's words—"my daughter," he rose to greet the girl. What was the amazement of Lady Cremlyn and Faith when he started, drew back, turned pale, and almost fell again into his chair gasping for breath.

"Faith dear, he is ill; run, and send some one at once," said her mother, "and do not come back yourself."

But in a few minutes, Captain Lennox, though still pale and trembling, had recovered himself enough to speak. "*Who* is that young lady who has just been in here? I do beseech you to tell me, Lady Cremlyn."

"That young lady! she is my daughter, but never mind about her now—drink this. I fear you must have been feeling very ill; you should not have ventured out this hot afternoon."

"But," said the Captain, still only half himself: "I saw her that night in India you know; she saved my life."

"Saved your life in India! why Faith has lived in England all her life—she has never been out of it except for an occasional visit on the Continent. What can you mean?"

"Oh, Lady Cremlyn, *do* let me tell you all about it." And he poured into her astonished ears the whole story of his danger and marvellous escape. "And it was your daughter in her white dress, just as I have seen her this afternoon, who came to warn me, and led me out of danger."

"Can you remember the exact date when this happened?" asked Lady Cremlyn. "I have a particular reason for wishing to know."

"Indeed I can: I am not likely to forget it."

And, as she expected, he named the date of the night before Faith's birthday.

"This is the most extraordinary story I ever heard," said Lady Cremlyn, and it was now Captain Lennox's turn to be astonished as she told him the tale of Faith's sudden illness and strange dream.

They were still deep in conversation when Lord Cremlyn appeared, and to him the wonderful facts were repeated. He listened with the closest attention and deepest interest. At the end:—"All I can say is, not a word of this to Faith at present; she is only just recovering from the effects of that night's events, whether real or fancied, and I will not have them all brought back to her mind."

"But you will not forbid me to see her, will you?" asked Captain Lennox anxiously. "Think how grateful I must ever feel to her."

Lord Cremlyn laughed and held out his hand to the young man. "No, I will not be so unkind as all that, I can trust you to be perfectly silent on the subject."

There is little to add to this story. It will easily be guessed that Faith and Captain Lennox soon became all in all to each other, and before many months had passed, were married, with the glad consent of Lord and Lady Cremlyn. It was well for Faith that the course of true love ran smooth for her. Though of a gentle disposition, she was also very firm, and her affections once given, were given for ever. It would have been impossible for her to transfer them, as her more yielding mother had done.

It was from her husband's lips that Faith first heard the story of his awful peril, and how she had seemed to him like a guardian angel. Her astonishment was great, and her voice had a touch of awe as she asked:

"Do you think, Douglas, that I *really* went over to India that night, or was it a dream only? Perhaps my white dress and fair hair made you imagine me one with your deliverer."

"Of course, Faithie, these things are very mysterious and we cannot be certain, but I think myself that in some way we cannot understand (through sleep or otherwise) your spirit was allowed to speak to mine that night. It was, I believe, my father's voice which you heard crying: 'Save him!' You had always loved him though you never saw him, and he became the link between us!"

For awhile Faith was silent—then she raised her head and said, "Suppose we had never come to Guernsey, Douglas,—suppose you had never found me!"

"Ah, my darling," he answered, "sooner or later I *must* have found you, for I believe that in spirit we were always one, and shall be one for ever."

ST. ANDREWS.

"This City boasts a royal and ancient college,
Where you'd think the leading industry was Greek;
But you'll find the favourite implements of knowledge
Are a 'putter,' and a 'driver,' and a 'cleek.'"

SO sings a local bard, one of the students, whose scarlet gowns brighten the grey streets of the "City of old St. Rule" in the winter months; and it is certainly impossible to spend ten minutes in St. Andrews without realising that it is the home and temple of golf.

The small local train that brings one from Leuchars Junction runs for some distance by the side of the links, where, to the uninitiated eye, men fling themselves into strange attitudes, and step out across the heathery turf with unnecessary eagerness. The swing and swirl with which the long club is brought round the shoulder seem ludicrously disproportionate to the little white ball. Little white ball, forsooth! Before a week is over the new-comer will have learnt to speak respectfully of it as "the globe," or technically as a "guttie." There are men in the streets too respectable to be cab touts, too shabby to be grooms, too frivolous to be regular working-men. These be the "caddies," who carry the sheaves of clubs required by the golfers, and suffer, as a class, from the peculiar degradation inevitable to those who find their occupation in attending on other men's pleasures.

Wee Robbie, whose flaxen head, above his dingy pinafore, has only braved the winds of three springs, is playing golf in the gutter, struggling with a miniature "putter," still much too large for him, and a battered ball. When wee Robbie grows up, he will probably be a professional golfer, a winner of matches and money, till whiskey destroys keen eye and steady hand. Then he will sink into a caddie, earning enough each morning to make him pleasantly drunk each night.

There was never an easier town to find one's way in than St. Andrews. The three chief streets—North Street, Market Street, and South Street—run parallel, one behind the other, beyond the "scaurs," the sea-front. Quiet grey streets, whose cobble-stones would be noisy were there much traffic; but, in sober truth, there is but one hansom cab in the place.

The conventional seaside villa is beginning to lift its unlovely head in the immediate outskirts; but the majority of the houses are old and very charming, with unexpected stairs and passages, and long green gardens, which, in some cases, are entered from the first floor.

The house where Queen Mary lived during the few occasions when she could fling aside her dismal state, and fancy herself happy once more, still stands at the end of South Street. It is easy to imagine the boom of the cannon that announced Chastelard's execution coming heavily to its windows from the Castle by the sea. St. Andrews is passing rich in ruins. The beautiful little chapel of the Grey Friars, with its broken, ivy-grown roof, which stands in front of the "Madras College," is all that now remains of a great monastery. It was one of the Grey Friars who betrayed young Patrick Hamilton, student, gentleman, and martyr, who in the very May morn of his youth was burnt by the wicked Cardinal Beaton. Tradition has it that the treacherous Grey Friar went mad with remorse, and that his restless shadow lingers in the chapel; those who are bold enough to watch may see it flicker in the moonlight.

The strange square tower of St. Regulus, fabulously old, and a puzzle to antiquarians, stands as a tombstone above the ruins of the wonderful Cathedral, of which enough still remains to show one what its beauties must have been before that terrible day when Knox bade the people "break down the idols." It once had a great roof of gilded copper, a wonder to the sailors leagues out at sea; now its roof is the winter clouds and the summer sunshine. And the greater part of its walls, that were so good, have vanished utterly; their place is only marked by lines in the green turf. One of its walls now serves to bound a garden; fruit-trees are trained there, and glass-houses built against it; but land taken from the Church is never blessed, and even in this present day there are whispers that ill-fate attends that house and garden.

The Cathedral ruins long served as a quarry for economical builders. Stones embedded in old walls, here and there in the town, show mutilated but unmistakable traces of the carving that once adorned them. Was it from there, I wonder, or from a tomb, that they carried a certain stone, whose legend is still clear on a wall in a little street—"They have said, and they will say; let them be saying"? Then follow initials and a date of long ago. For whom were these words graven so deeply, whose suffering chose this mode of expression? The heart of youth, or the pride of age, love that defied law, or penury that wronged others? We shall never know.

A little way from the Cathedral, along the "scaurs," is the sea-washed Castle of Cardinal Beaton, the Bastille of Scotland, now a crumbling ruin. One day, as I watched it, a poorly-dressed man stopped near me, and seemed to read my thoughts. He phrased them thus: "Yon's been a grand house the day; but their heids dinna ache now that danced there." Strife and turmoil, revel and brawl, have passed away, and there reigns a great peace. "Tired heart and burning brow, ye are very patient now." Some day, perhaps, the castle and all its bloodstained memories will be engulphed in the ever-encroaching sea; but at present it is a place for children's mirth

and lovers' meetings, and there are many quiet nooks to sketch and read and dream in.

The caretaker, an old man bent with age, must be summoned from the damp, dark, guard-room, whence he emerges, blinking like an owl at midday, to show the "Bottle Dungeon." Pass through a low door, stumble down a few steps, through another door, and you find yourself looking over a low parapet down what seems, in the dim light, to be a well. Two lighted candles at the end of a string are let down, spinning as they go, and, behold, the horrible well widens to a damp, earthy space many, many feet below. It was here that young Rothesay lived a few long miserable days before he was taken away—drawn up with a windlass through the "Bottle Neck"—and taken to his place of death. Here it was that men who died for their faith were imprisoned, measuring the days, no glimmer of whose light could reach them, by the beating of the tide on the rock without, and knowing that when their eyes next saw the sun, it would be shining upon the faggots and the stake.

Under the moat, now dry and grass-grown, is the secret passage, but that is a disappointment, a fascinating story which is never continued. The passage is a recent discovery, and to explore it further might imperil the foundations of an inopportune house, ignorantly built above it. No one doubts that the passage led to the Cathedral Monastery, but every one would like to be quite certain.

Even now, in spite of the ruins and the shouting children at play round the well in the courtyard, one can vividly picture that early morning when "a handful of resolute gentlemen" entered the Castle, Cardinal Beaton's stronghold, found the terrified old man crouching in the corner of his room, and slew him, relentlessly and gravely, holding solemn parley with him the while, and using many words of Scripture. "I am a priest. I am a priest"—that was his one defence, and little it availed him. After the last gasping sob and his last words, "Fie, fie, all is marred," the "honourable murderers," who deemed that they bore the sword of Heaven, hung him from his window, the window where he had sat to watch his human bonfires, a terror in the morning sun. That window still remains, a square in the wall, but the floor of the room has long since fallen away.

But all this was in time long past, and a little distance from the Castle wall shows happier sights. There is the Royal and Ancient Club-house—a group of expectant "caddies" waiting near; the red coats worn as danger signals by the golfers make pleasant flicks of colour on the green expanses; and children are building fortresses on the "West Sands."

These "West Sands" stretch between the "links" and the sea, and form a dry walk in all weathers, the distance, along them to the Eden mouth, where the little river joins the sea, is about two miles. Shells of many kinds are to be found at the mouth of the Eden, and there are the mussel beds so precious to the fishing community. Pass

where you will by the cottages near the harbour, you will see the fisherwomen with heavy trails of brown lines and pails full of shelled mussels, deftly baiting each of the many hooks. The mussel is provided with a species of natural button-hole, and the quick movement of the fingers that fastens it to the hook is very like that of crochet. Now that the fish is sold before it is caught, and the fishmonger's cart waits at the pier as soon as the returning boats are sighted, it is unusual to see a fisherwoman with a heavy creel on her back. A picturesque sight the less, and as such one is sorry to lose it, but the new arrangement must make the lives of these hard-working women a little easier.

One of the best girls' schools in Scotland is at St. Andrews, and the rosy bonny pupils may be known at a glance by the "college hat" they wear. White sailor hats, with distinguishing ribbons for each house, which prove becoming alike to dark or fair faces, short curly hair or heavy straight locks. These happy girls are allowed a great deal of liberty, and fully deserve the confidence placed in them, which encourages a healthy *esprit de corps* not to be found in all schools. Not for them is the dreary daily walk, a long procession, two and two; one meets them in groups of four or six, big girls and little girls judiciously blended, shell hunting on the sands, or returning flower-laden from country rambles. To this school belongs the honour of having educated Mrs. Butler (Miss Agneta Ramsay), the Senior Wrangler.

Golf is a subject that requires at least one whole article to itself, but it is difficult to think of the links at St. Andrews without saying a few words concerning this fascinating game. Opinions are very much divided as to its suitability for girls, though "small golf," such as is played on the "Ladies' Link," is a charming pastime, needing no especial strength, exacting no particular costume, and affording pleasant training for eye and hand. But golf on the "Long Links" is a serious undertaking, and should only be attempted by girls who possess the precious gifts of health, strength, good-temper and common-sense: for without these advantages no girl can be even a mediocre golf-player. I know girls who can "drive" as far and "putt" as well as, if not better than, the average man, and have noticed admiringly that the strength of their strokes does not entail ungraceful attitudes nor any affectation of mannishness. Very pretty and business-like they look too in their trim serge skirts and coats, white blouses and plain sailor hats; but to set against this pleasing picture, I have sundry irritating memories of girls in fantastic dresses, flying ribbons, and feathered hats, with which the sea breeze dealt mercilessly, struggling and straining in most awkward positions, and keeping the whole "green" waiting during their ineffectual efforts to hit their ball.

A golfing dress cannot be too neat and simple. It must be short enough to walk in easily, and loose enough to allow the arms free

swing; while for headgear the choice should lie between a "deer-stalker" cap, a cloth or velvet "Tam o' Shanter," or a plain sailor hat; the last being perhaps best, as the brim shades the eyes.

There is even a certain art in "walking round with a match," simple as that act may seem, and the secret of good behaviour on such an occasion is self-effacement. The game may be of small interest to you; but it is very absorbing to the players, and when they are considering the "lie" of the ground and the best direction to send their balls your brightest remarks will be inopportune. At these times a little silence will be very golden. Terrible accidents have occurred owing to lookers-on thoughtlessly standing close behind a man about to play; your place is several paces behind and well to the left of the player, that during the swing back your fluttering skirts may not catch his eye, and "put him off his stroke." For the same reason boas and streamers should be left at home. These facts once remembered, to "walk round" is a most delightful form of exercise; the turf is soft and springy, enamelled with bluebells in summer and heather in autumn, and there is the yellow furze which flowers all the year. The old saw has it,

"When the furze is out of bloom,
Then sweet love is out of tune;"

and as that last can never be, the furze is always blossoming, and its fragrance comes in gusts on the fresh sea-wind. I suppose the links must sometimes be bleak and dreary, but I have seldom, if ever, walked on them without finding a gleam of sunshine, and hearing a skylark sing.

From a distance, and especially from the sea, one loses sight of the modern features of St. Andrews; the ruined Cathedral and Castle seem still to be stately buildings, and the town looks much as it must have done to the longing eyes of John Knox, when the galley wherein he toiled passed near the coast he knew and loved so well.

This little grey city by the sea is not like a Scotch town; a charm difficult to define, but easy to feel, haunts its quiet ways, an old-world shadow enfolds it; it has a spell, a gentle influence, the stronger for its very gentleness.

When those who love it are very far away, they can still see, through closed eyes, the stately grey ruins; the cottages by the harbour, the green stretch of the links, bordered by golden sands, and the clear blue of the waves in the sunshine. As the dream-picture grows more distinct, they hear again the murmur and moan of the sea that breaks on the walls of the Cardinal's Castle.

"A stranger, I have wandered
By foreign hills and streams;
But still that ceaseless murmur,
Has followed me in dreams."

ALICE MACDONALD.

THE STREGA'S CURSE.

By Lady Margaret Majendie.

CHAPTER VI.

THE days passed on, there was no return of fever. The cherished son of the house entered upon convalescence—a convalescence so slow, so gradual, that it was not always quite easy to recognise.

One evening Giovanni came out of the sick-room about five o'clock, seeking the refreshment of a change of scene. He found Aimée in the green salon. She was standing almost on a tiptoe of expectation, evidently waiting for him.

"Gian," she exclaimed, "I thought you were never coming! How long you have been with Livio to-day! How is he?"

"He has been restless and excited, we could not keep him calm," answered Giovanni with a sigh.

"Ah, you are tired!" she said sympathetically.

"No, no, little one; only a little disheartened," he answered, trying to be bright and cheerful. "After all, it may only be the oppression of this tremendous heat."

"Come out into the garden!" said the child. "There is no sun. Take a cigarette, and we will go into the *ilex bosco*, and sit under the trees."

She threw open one of the windows and stepped out into the *loggia*. A little breeze was beginning to stir the long linen curtains.

"This is pleasant!" said Giovanni. "No, Aimée, not the *bosco*, there is more air here. Let us keep away from the trees."

He threw himself into a large deep bamboo chair which was agreeably shaded by a mass of vine foliage, and Aimée drew a stool forward and sat down, leaning her elbows on her knees and supporting her pretty chin on her clasped hands.

"What a comfort it is when there is no sun!" said Aimée with a sigh.

"Yes; the heat to-day has been almost unbearable."

"But it will not last. Look there, Gian!"

Before them the many-terraced gardens were gorgeous with flowers growing in a state of half-neglected luxuriance. They threw scarlet and yellow and purple reflections on the clear depths of a wide basin of water, round which stone dolphins threw jets of water into the air. Overhead great black clouds were gathering, rolling up in heavy masses edged with a strange lurid light.

Giovanni lay back with closed eyes.

"Poor Gian! poor Gian!" said little Aimée softly. "You will feel greatly refreshed after the storm is over. I will not talk to you until then."

"Talk on, little one!" he said lazily. "It is as pleasant to hear you talk as to hear the fountains splash. Do not mind my closed eyes. I am listening, not sleeping."

"I did want to talk to you, Gian!" said the child earnestly.

"Well, dear?"

"I want to know what it is that makes Aunt Christina look so terribly worn and anxious now that Livio is getting well. Why is she so often whispering to you and stopping herself? Is she still alarmed about him? Yesterday I heard Dr. Morello tell her that there was no danger now. 'There is hallucination,' he said; 'it is very common after such a bout of blood-poisoning.' What does it mean?"

"I will tell you, Aimée. The thing that wears out your aunt and —and perhaps myself also, is that Livio seems to have something on his mind which distresses him keenly, and it is that that retards his recovery."

"Can you not make him tell you? He always tells you everything!" said the child wistfully; "some day, of course, he will tell me, but I cannot expect that until I am his wife."

"His wife? Aimée, what do you mean?"

"Nothing!" said the child, startled by the quickness of his manner. "Of course you know that it is to be so. It was arranged by his uncle and aunt Christina with my uncle Eugène de Marcelin last year. You must have heard?"

"No, indeed! and what did Livio say?"

"Oh, Livio does not mind at all. He only laughed over it. Surely that can have nothing to do with the trouble he has on his mind?"

Giovanni looked at her, but he could perceive only the most childish simplicity in her words and manner; he little guessed how nearly she approached the truth.

"Has Aunt Christina no idea of what it is?" she said sorrowfully.

"Not the slightest!" he answered, a fervent longing crossing his mind that she never might know, and then a sickening feeling of dismay, that it would sooner or later become inevitable.

"And you say his recovery depends on his being freed from this trouble?" she said. "You do not think, Gian, that he would tell me? Is it anything to do with money? I have lots of money you know."

"No, he could not tell you, little one—it is quite impossible. It has nothing to do with money."

"I believe you know all about it," cried Aimée. "If so, why do you not tell Aunt Christina and let her help him!"

"I? How should I know? It is of no use making all sorts of conjectures, Aimée. Your Aunt Christina cannot help him."

"But you can! O Gian, Gian! Morello said that it would make such a difference in his recovery, if his mind were at ease."

"I know it, but—— Ah! there it comes!"

The thunder pealed loudly overhead, a glare of purple lightning played over the sky, followed by another long sullen roar.

"How fine! how beautiful!" cried Aimée in childish delight.

"It has begun very suddenly!" said Giovanni, looking up at the clouds. "If I mistake not it will be a violent storm."

Another brilliant flash lit up everything, and the crash of thunder went rolling on continuously.

"The heat is awful!" exclaimed Giovanni, stretching out his arms. "Come, Aimée, the storm is getting too near, you had better come in."

"Not yet!" she answered. "It is so beautiful. O Gian, look at the lightning! those glancing, darting sheets of blue and white and purple fire! Does it hurt your eyes? The roll of the thunder makes one think of mighty angels driving great war-chariots to battle. How grand it makes the world!"

"Ha! That is coming too near."

For the thunder cracked and rattled right overhead, so deafening a sound that little Aimée could not resist the fear which made her rush to the protection of Giovanni's outstretched arm and hide her face on his shoulder.

"You must come in, my child," he said, feeling how the slight little figure was trembling. "It is too much for you."

"Let me see once more. Ah!"

The vividness of the next flash was such that Aimée was glad to be taken indoors laughing at her own fears.

"Were you ever at Maiano, Gian?" she exclaimed suddenly.

"Maiano! How? when? What do you know of it?"

In the sudden surprise he stammered and grew scarlet; putting her a little quickly off his arm he began turning over the leaves of an album on the table.

Aimée looked a little astonished. "I have been there!" she said; "and the reason I spoke of it was that we saw a wonderful thunder-storm there."

"When was it?" said Giovanni, hoping that the darkness of the storm would conceal the difficulty he had in commanding his countenance.

"Last May."

"May?"

"Why are you so much surprised? It is off the main road, of course, but there was a reason for our expedition. Don Jacopo wanted to have a perfect cast of the Lucca della Robbia over the church door—but stay! You say you have never been there?"

Giovanni shook his head slightly. She went on:

"It is a very beautiful one; and uncle Jacopo employed Scappi of the Borgo San Jacopo to do the cast for him. He told him that

his carver was a native of Maiano, and called him a very interesting fellow, a real artist. His name is Nino Dori. Uncle Jacopo became interested in talking to him, especially when this Nino began describing the Della Robbia, and brought out some clever sketches of it in charcoal and in water-colour. Dori advised him to go and see it; and so, you see, we went—Don Jacopo, my aunt Christina, and myself."

"You actually went to Maiano? Did you sleep there?"

"No; it is a poor little place. The inn a mere *osteria*. We stayed two hours to rest the horses, and then drove down again."

"And was it amusing?"

"Oh, yes. We left Don Jacopo absorbed in his Della Robbia, and aunt Christina and I wandered away up the road, and then down some steep steps into the cemetery. It is very large. They bring there all the poor dead from far-off towns. I think I myself should like to be buried in that beautiful place, half in the valley shadows, half on the hillside where the white tombs and crosses stand up in a tangle of wild flowers and brushwood. There we saw something very striking."

"What was it? An apparition?" said Giovanni, trying to force a little laugh.

"No, a girl; but such a girl! She was sitting on the rough pile of large stones which forms the base of the great black cross, doing nothing, and aunt Christina touched my arm and whispered, "Aímée! I never saw any one so beautiful in my life!"

"Ah! was she then so beautiful?"

"She rose and came to meet us. She had a scarlet handkerchief bound round her head beneath which you could see her magnificent black hair. She bowed to us as if she had been an empress, and then she began moving away slowly and reluctantly as if she would have liked to stop and talk, but was too proud."

"Then you did not speak to her?" said Giovanni, with his head still turned away.

"Yes, aunt Christina went up to her and began asking about the Lucca della Robbia, but she had never heard of it, and seemed hardly to understand. When my aunt explained that she meant the Pietà over the church door, she shrugged her shoulders and said she did not care for such old rubbish—we had better ask Nino. I said 'Do you mean Nino Dori?' And when she said 'Yes,' I told her that he had come up with us from Florence, and was at that moment talking to my uncle in the church. She gave a great start, and then turned and ran up the hill as swiftly as a deer, without giving us the smallest nod of good-bye. Aunt Christina and I both laughed. She said she had never seen so splendid a specimen of uncivilised humanity."

Giovanni gave a deep sigh; the thought that this young savage was Livio's wife gave him so sharp a stab that Aimée exclaimed:

"Gian, I hope it is only the lightning and this heavy darkness that makes you look so pale. You are not ill?"

"No," he answered with an effort. "And all this time you have never told me about the storm at Maiano."

"It was glorious! The thunder knocking about among the hills like some big game at ball. The lightning beautiful as that! Oh, Gian, what a storm! This heat is overpowering. I wonder how Livio bears it!"

As if in answer to her exclamation the door opened and Donna Christina came swiftly in, looking greatly troubled.

"Gian!" she exclaimed. "Can you go to Livio? I can do nothing with him. I do not know how to soothe him. I suppose the storm has got upon his nerves."

"He is not wandering again?"

"Not exactly, but he is restless and excited; he throws off his coverings; he moans and shivers; even the opiate has no effect."

"He will be better when the storm is over," said Giovanni, encouragingly.

"Will you go and see what you can do? I seem only to make him worse."

She sank down into a chair, and Aimée came gently nestling up to her.

"You are worn out, darling auntie," she said, lovingly.

The tears rushed into Donna Christina's eyes at the affectionate words.

"Will you go, Gian?" she said, and he obeyed her with a deep sigh.

Giovanni Montana dreaded being left alone with his friend, dreaded greatly the inevitable hour which must now be approaching in which, restored to full consciousness, Livio would pour out his confidences. Giovanni did not know what he should say when Livio would ask him for news of the beautiful young wife pining away in her far-off mountain home. Three long months had passed, and during his long illness Giovanni had never written any news of him, had not even sent a message to Colomba. He was acting without any plan. He hated the whole subject so much that he would not take her side of the story into consideration—towards her he was entirely harsh and bitter—and though there were moments in which his conscience reproached him for unkindness, even cruelty, he would not lift a finger to save her the wearing, torturing anxiety to which she must have been a victim.

But now it was different. He dreaded that his friend should turn upon him and ask him why he had proved so unkind, so faithless. Every day he had been expecting some such scene, and had been puzzled by Livio's continued silence on the subject. It could not continue, and Giovanni, when he took his way to his friend's room that evening, felt with a shiver that the time had come, that there could be no further delay.

CHAPTER VII.

THE lightning glared through the room, penetrating the closed persiennes, shooting in wild zig-zags over the polished floor. The thunder rattled and roared with such a din that it seemed as if it were actually in the room, rolling round the walls, crashing against the ceiling.

Livio was sitting up in bed, and he held out his hands with a hurried cry of, "Gian, Gian, come to me!"

Giovanni bounded forward; the appeal went to his heart, he loved this young fellow so entirely; he was closer than a brother to him. As he held his white thin hands in his own strong clasp, he said within himself that he would sacrifice anything in the world, his life itself, almost his soul, for him. The softened look shone in his face and in his clear blue eyes.

"What is it, my dear fellow?" he exclaimed. "This is a magnicent storm, but it is the ruin of one's nerves. It is the electricity—it is too near. I myself am quite shaking, and you are weaker, and must feel it more."

Livio flung himself back with a moan.

"Psha!" he exclaimed. "It is not the storm, it is something that I have on my mind that I want to speak about and dare not! I suppose this sort of fever weakens one's brain, eh?"

"For a time, very possibly," said Gian, with dry lips.

"It torments me, torments me till I do not know what to do—and for such a bagatelle! a trifle! I have had hideous dreams, and I cannot disentangle dreams and reality."

"Do you think, Livio, that it is good for you to try?" said Gian, bitterly. "Heaven knows there are dreams or memories in most lives that one would fain keep at bay as long as possible."

"I shall have no rest till I get to the bottom of it," said the invalid miserably. "I cannot ask my mother, she knows so little about my life. Gian, you must help me."

"What is it?"

"Were we, you and I, ever at a place up in the mountains together?"

Giovanni started. Had his friend's memory failed him so completely as this? He felt a wish to test it.

"What sort of place?" he said, evasively.

"I can't remember. There were rocks and houses and a woman."

"A woman!" exclaimed Giovanni, forcing a short laugh. "What sort of woman?"

"Gian!" exclaimed Livio, pressing his brow with a look of great perplexity. "It seems an absurd question to ask, but one's brain is subject to delusion—Morello said so—in fevers like this one. Put

me right! It must be nonsense! I am not married, am I? You pause! Gian, don't terrify me! I am still very weak."

The poor young fellow's eyes were following his friend with a look of such terror that Giovanni could scarcely bear it; his first thought, regardless of consequences, was to soothe and reassure him.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed. "What are you dreaming about? Married? Nonsense."

Livio released his hold on his friend's arm, and sank back with a long sigh.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "And yet the dream was so vivid, so fearfully like reality!"

"What did you dream, Livio?" said Giovanni, turning away his head, though he still held his hand fast.

"I dreamt that we were together in a mountain place. I cannot remember what it was like, but there was a woman there who held me fast, and said she was my wife. Such a woman! horrible! so hateful to me that I dread sleep for very terror, lest I should see her black eyes and red cheeks, looking at me and claiming me in my dreams."

"Was she beautiful, Livio?"

"I don't know. To me she was horrible. It was the claim on me, the hopeless feeling that I could never, never escape, that oppressed me so horribly. But you say it was only a dream. You reassure me."

For a moment Giovanni paused. Then, seeing the terrified look coming back, and the tightened grasp on his hand, he put aside his last remaining scruples, and said loudly:

"It is all nonsense, Livio. Be a man and forget it altogether. Married indeed! Have you obtained permission from the colonel?"

"That is true," he answered with a look of profound relief. "Of course. How could I forget that? You relieve me. I cannot tell you how much. You always do me good, Gian."

He looked up affectionately into his friend's pale face.

The lightning glanced through the room.

"The storm goes further off," said Giovanni, longing to change the subject. "The air will soon be cooler."

"I think I shall sleep now," said Livio, drowsily. "I shall not be afraid now of a dream, an idle myth."

"Yes, yes, you will sleep now—there is nothing to fear," said Giovanni.

Livio did not speak again, and Gian sat quietly by his bedside, watching the lightning flashes become fewer and more far-between and the thunder rolling away into a more distant, more musical roar.

As he sat there, his own words began to appear to him in their true light. He had soothed and comforted his friend at the expense of truth. A cold misgiving assailed him, asking him whether what he had done was fearfully wrong? It was not justifiable to soothe

even the restlessness of semi-delirium by a lie—and might it not be a thousand times worse in the end?

The marriage was a fact; the wife of whom Livio had spoken with horror and dismay was a reality, no myth, and sooner or later the truth must be faced.

He moved uneasily in his chair, and the invalid was startled in his sleep; he caught nervously at his hand, repeating plaintively, "Gian! Gian!"

"Yes, it is all right, my poor boy!" said Giovanni almost in a whisper, softly stroking the dark hair.

But it was of no use to cry comfort when there was no comfort, and, alas! it was not all right.

The next morning, when Giovanni first met Donna Christina, she made a quick exclamation of dismay. "Is anything the matter, Gian?" she asked with keen anxiety.

"No. What should be the matter?" he answered quickly.

But she was not satisfied. He looked flushed and haggard, with the hard look of sleeplessness in his eyes. She cross-questioned him. Had he caught a chill? Had he fever? Had he not slept? till he was obliged to confess that finding he could not sleep, he had been sitting up all night with Livio, the third night that he had done so.

"And now," he said, passing his hand wearily through his hair, "I want you to spare me to-day, to go down to Florence. I shall return to-morrow; I have some important business with Pellegrini, my lawyer, that I can no longer put off."

"How much longer will your leave last?" asked Aimée wistfully, for she was very fond of her kind friend.

"Only another week. But now our task is over—Livio is so much better that we shall soon have him out of bed."

"What have you done to him?" said Donna Christina tenderly. "He is altogether different this morning. He is calm and bright, all the shadows have passed away; he is serene as that blue sky now that the storm is over. O Gian! it is all your doing."

A dark flush mounted into Giovanni's face, he looked so troubled that Aimée saw it, and wondered at it in her little gentle heart.

Donna Christina noticed nothing. She was so absorbed in her son, in everything that concerned him only, that she had become unobservant.

"How will you go?" she said. "Will you ride? or shall Giorgio drive you to the station? Do you take luggage?"

"I will walk to the station; no luggage; I shall go to my rooms in Florence, and return to-morrow, early. Meanwhile do not let Livio torment himself further with his feverish fancies."

"I wish I knew the spell you made use of to quiet and comfort him," said his mother brightly.

"Tell him not to worry himself about anything. Tell him that I can assure him that it is all right," said Giovanni hastily.

In ten minutes he was on his way to the station, walking very fast, trying by bodily fatigue to drown the unpleasantness of his own thoughts.

Signor Pellegrini Avvocato was at home when Giovanni Montana arrived at the door of his tall, pale green house in the Via Larga.

He knew his own value too well to admit him at once without an appointment, so Giovanni found himself obliged to wait in some impatience. He had time to note everything in the lofty bare room into which he had been ushered. The distempered walls were bordered with a coarsely stencilled pattern of acanthus design, long white cotton curtains with heavy fringes were draped in elaborate festoons round windows darkened by close iron *grilles* outside.

Giovanni was so nervous and troubled that the time of waiting seemed an eternity, and when at last he was summoned, he sprang up so hastily that he threw down his chair with a loud and startling crash.

The interview with Signor Pellegrini lasted about half an hour, and when Giovanni came out he was exceedingly pale, but the look of anxiety had passed out of his face. He went straight home to his lodging in the Via Ceretani, went upstairs and sat down to think.

Pellegrini had told him this: that Livio's marriage, having only taken place before the priest, was no marriage at all; legally he was free as himself.

Signor Pellegrini was a good man, he repeated several times that a man of honour would respect the church's service and not take advantage of the position; but at the same time the good lawyer was very emphatic about the fact that the ceremony gone through at Maiano had legally no importance whatever. He did not attempt to defend the condition of the law on this point—on the contrary, he condemned it heartily. He told Giovanni that some of the older priests who refused to acknowledge the new conditions of government in Italy, stuck to their opinion that the church ceremony was enough, and grievous mischief had arisen from this obstinacy. No court of law in Italy would accept the marriage of Livio and Colomba as legal, as it now stood.

Giovanni of course had not betrayed the names of the two chiefly concerned, and Pellegrini looked at him sharply and with keen suspicion. The somewhat undefined condition of the law had been the cause of trouble often enough to make the old lawyer regret deeply that nothing was done to remedy it. As he thought over his conversation with Giovanni, the good man half regretted that he had told him so emphatically that there was no case to stand upon. He sighed and ruffled up his white hair angrily, wondering whether mischief would come of it.

Meanwhile Giovanni sat alone in his rooms, feeling very lonely and worn out. The long nights of sleepless attendance were telling on his frame, the perplexity of conscience weighing on his mind. What

should he do? Livio was one of the most chivalrously honourable of men. Thinking over all the men he knew, Giovanni felt that not one would be so generous, so honourable as his friend. He would be the very last man in the world to accept the new position of escape offered to him. The first thing that would occur to him when his health returned would be to go up to the hills, complete the marriage ceremonies and claim his bride, in spite of all change of feeling. That some very marked change of feeling had come over him, Giovanni could not doubt. He had witnessed the shuddering horror with which he had shrunk from the very idea of that dream-wife. But he fancied that returning health would bring back memory and love.

He sat with his head on his hand thinking, till it seemed as if his brain reeled. At first he thought he would go up to Maiano and explain the state of things to Colomba; then he shrank from it almost with terror. He dared not face the frantic anger of that beautiful savage. He knew that no one at Maiano knew either his own name or that of his friend; it had pleased both to disguise the fact of their wealth and position—poor young Livio from the romantic notion that so he was loved for himself only; Giovanni himself, because he had always been looking for some way of escape, some possibility of extricating himself and his friend from the scrape into which they had fallen.

Perhaps—when this last thought came into his head Giovanni leapt to his feet and began pacing up and down the room—perhaps it had happened to Livio that the memory of this particular episode in his life would never come back. It was so sometimes—such things were known to happen in very severe cases of illness. This would indeed be a solution of the difficulty.

Giovanni could not think it out, he was sinking with fatigue. He flung himself on to his bed and dropped into sleep so profound that, when his landlady came in, she was startled, thinking that one so white and so still must be dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

Scappi's shop in the Borgo San Jacopo was not a very large or important-looking place, but at this time some of the very finest carving in the world was being executed in it. The tall street was narrow and confined, but the houses ran back a long way, reaching the border of the river Arno. There were long low rooms from the street to the river, lighted by big, square windows, which let in all the light necessary for the finest work.

One of these long rooms was the workshop altogether devoted to Nino Dori and his wonderful works In the same house lived Scappi and his wife and two children.

Scappi had been a very good carver himself once, but his eyes had failed him, so that he could do no fine work. He did most of the gilding; the wonderful red, goldleaf gilding which Nino exacted, and which was so much finer and more durable than the yellow stuff with which others were contented.

No one had a more keen appreciation of Nino's genius than his master. Nino had come to him as a very poor apprentice, bringing with him a few specimens of his skill as a plea to be taken on without the usual prentice fees. Scappi at the time was beginning to feel the failure of his eyes, but he recognised something great, genius of a rare order, in the carved cluster of seed-pods and leafage the pale deformed lad brought with him. Little Signora Scappi was indignant enough. She was a fat little round woman, with, at that time, only one swaddled baby done up so tightly that it was as hard as a bit of wood. She thought the little wooden mummy might have to suffer privation soon, and it seemed hard that her husband, in this reckless way, should bring in another mouth to feed at such a moment.

But Scappi was right, the new apprentice was worth his weight in gold. It was not only that people soon began to flock to the shop and orders came in a great deal faster than they could be executed, but he was so kind and useful in the house; he would carry up the wood and water, would light the stove, nurse the baby, and do everything possible to ease his master. Just at first there was not very much to eat. A whole set of large frames, executed by Scappi for an order, had been returned unpaid for. They were the work of some months. Nino, when he saw them, was not much astonished. Scappi would not have sent out such work but for his failing eyesight.

It was very uphill work, and two days in the week Pippa, the little wife, could not help crying that there was nothing for supper but crusts of bread boiled in hot water and pepper; but as Nino observed, all the tears in the world would not do any good, and who could say what to-morrow might bring forth?

The struggle had been long over now. There was an appearance of comfort, even of affluence, about the old home. The workshops were full of beautiful things, samples of panels, of frames, of carved work for cathedral stalls. In his spare moments Nino was always carving these samples; and they were the origin of numerous orders.

Pippa's rooms were furnished now with cherished brass and copper vessels, kept with great pride and diligence; her china was white and yellow and gold. The walls of her parlour were frescoed with landscape, blue skies, blue seas, lilac mountains, trellis work foregrounds of large dark leaves. Pippa flattered herself that the delusion was complete. Whenever Nino had a spare moment he would rapidly paint in a new bird or a butterfly, or a gigantic dragon-fly among the leaves, to the wild delight of the two black-eyed children Ceccho and

Nana, whom he taught to believe that the wonderful mountain world of which he often told them was full of such brilliant things.

Nino was hard at work one day, sitting very close to the square window which looked out over the river, as if he were trying to get all the light that he possibly could. He was engaged on some wonderfully delicate carving, a little arabesque of dark fine-grained hard wood in high relief on a background which would be diapered with gold. It was to be a panel for the centre of a fine casket, and the customer who had ordered it was a connoisseur in such work. Nino had worked for him before, he was Don Giacopo Baldova, Livio Baldova's art-loving uncle.

The old Count was very fond of Nino Dori, he would often spend an hour or more lounging in his workshop, he would bring him rare bits of old work to be copied or restored. He flattered himself with the belief that the fates had thrown a genius in his way, and that it was his own vocation to develop it.

Nino was doing his very best for his patron, partly because he was attached to the kind enthusiastic old man, partly because the design that he had made had taken his fancy. He thought that he could produce a casket not only worthy of the family jewels it would contain, but in point of artistic value not far from their own.

He was carving a palm-tree to-day, the relief so high and so delicate that the graceful palm foliage flung soft rich shadows on the stem. Don Giacopo had quarrelled with him a little over this stem, he said it was too well done, too realistic; but Nino, though outwardly most politely, tenderly yielding, in reality had never been known to yield an inch, and his lilliputian palm-tree was an absolute masterpiece.

Pippa came in with the swaddled baby upright in her arms. It was done up so tightly that it would have required force to bend it. So there was no danger to its youthful spine beyond the rolling about of the helpless little head.

"Peace, Ceccho," she was saying as she sat down with a wide yawn, and gave the black-eyed boy clinging to her petticoats a little shake. "If you come here, take a piece of wood, carve it and be silent, or you will interrupt Nino. Eh, Nino? I am not in your way? Speak and I go! Eh, eh! but you carve minutely—altro! even as poor Scappi did before the dust got into his eyes!"

Nino suppressed a little smile. It was very nice that Pippa should say so, but she knew, both knew, that there was a vast difference between the work of the excellent Scappi and his partner. It was a little delusion that Pippa liked to keep up when she reflected that all the prosperity, all the money, everything came from Nino now.

"Why do you take such pains?" she went on. "It is hardly worth while. It will ruin your eyes. Surely that effect is as good," and she pointed to a group of carved fruits and flowers on the wall.

"Ah, but that is for a different purpose," said Nino; he did not

care to explain, and he was holding a very fine instrument between his teeth at the moment.

"You cannot stop five minutes to talk; and yet it is hot, there is thunder in the air. In Scappi's best days he never worked as you do.

Nino did not answer, he was too busy.

"Ceccho! Cec!" shouted Pippa, convinced that her son was in danger; but he was not, he was as happy as a king, cutting up the little bit of rough wood Nino had tossed to him.

"Nino, I want to talk to you," said Pippa.

"Talk on, Padrona. I am listening," answered Nino; he was quite accustomed to it.

"It is not very much I have to say," she began, and there was a little thrill in her voice which made Nino turn round suddenly, and look at her. The little woman's fat, good-tempered face was rather puckered up and agitated.

"What is it, Padrona?" he said kindly.

"It is this. We are making a great deal of money now, eh?"

"But that is no misfortune!" he said gaily, turning back to his work.

"You do not let me speak," she exclaimed anxiously,

"We make much money. That cabinet alone! I heard you make the bargain. Santa Maria! but the Count can drive one hard!"

"Yes, he is cleverer at that than I am," said Nino smiling. "But anyhow, the price is not bad."

"Not bad certainly, but Scappi was saying yesterday that you might well change your system and ask fancy prices, you would get what you will. The little japonica flower you introduce as your badge is well known now."

Nino did not answer, he was too busy.

"Well, I must come to the point," she went on, the thrill of emotion coming back into her voice. "I have a proposal to make to you, my friend."

"Say on Padrona."

He thought she would propose a flavouring of tomatoes instead of onions in the *risotto* that night, or something of the same nature. But Pippa had begun to cry a little. "The whole arrangement is unfair," she exclaimed. "You ought to be working for yourself, putting by for your future, and here you find yourself at your age saddled with a helpless man and his family who have no claim on you. I tell you it must come to an end."

He wheeled round on his stool and took her little fat hand in his. "What folly is this?" he exclaimed. "Pray where should I have been but for Scappi, tell me that?"

"True," she said sobbing. "But all the same the kindness of a year does not mean a life's maintenance. *Via!*"

"You are my sister, Scappi my brother! we are one family. Let no nonsense come between us. Have we not enough?"

The good little woman's heart was bursting with gratitude. "Enough!" she exclaimed. "But it is too much. Listen, we cannot separate, but this we can do—no longer share in common. I will be your housekeeper, you shall pay me regularly, enough to keep us going until Ceccho is older. I will manage for you. Scappi can do as he does now, you shall pay him your own price, the right price for the gilding, but all the big profits, all the money you receive shall be yours, all your own."

She threw out her hands imploringly.

Nino shook his head. "You suggest an impossibility," he said. "But see, dear Padrona, I also have a plan to propose which would suit me better than that."

She looked up with eager anxiety. "Not to leave us? Do not say it, Nino."

"Leave you? What should I do without my children?"

He suddenly picked up Ceccho by the folds of his voluminous blouse, and gave three or four quick kisses to the top of his little black shaven head. "No, no! we must stick together. What I want to suggest is this: I think now that I might afford to marry."

Pippa clapped her hands.

"And bring her here—the beautiful Colomba! Ah, that is a good idea. I will wait on her; she shall be my sister; but, oh, Nino, will she not mind it—our life together?"

"That I can answer for," he said brightly. "We will arrange a charming room for her looking on the river."

"No, no! on the street. The river is so dull. In the street there is life, there is something to watch."

"Ah," said Nino, rather sadly. "But you forget that when one comes down from the great mountain world where the wild breezes sweep fresh and strong through the valleys, and hill and sky seem to meet in a glory of colour and light, a little street seems dark and close. She will not be able to breathe."

"Bah!" said Pippa, snapping her fingers. "Who cares for such things? One would die of the sameness; but the street is life. One sits at the window, one sees the carts and carriages go by. One hears old Peporella yonder scream at her deaf husband in the most cheerful way. The newspaper boys race for the first turn on the Ponte Vecchio. Even this morning a mule fell down and there must have been twenty people at least helping it up again. Carola was there chattering to them all, the little bold-faced minx. Since her mother went out to service, and there is no one to beat her till she weeps, she leads a merry life. That is what we women call life. *Via!*"

"You think that will please Colomba?" said Nino, wistfully. "See, the poor child will not have much to look at in a husband. Who would take one deformed like me?"

"Bah, really, Nino, you are past all patience! Why, who could look better than yourself at church on a festa? If you will follow

my advice, and buy yourself a mustard-coloured suit of the new shade, there is not a dandy on the Lung Arno who will look better. As for your back, we are as Heaven made us, and if she is such a beauty, she will attract all the eyes away from you to herself. Please her?" and the good little woman's eyes filled with tears. "I cannot imagine a happier life, a husband with a heart of gold, and such a view into the Borgo."

Nino shook her hands warmly. "You comfort me," he said. "I had misgivings. I once saw a wild mountain eagle enclosed in a cage, its eyes were maddened by a terrible look of despair."

"Eagles are not women," said Pippa, composedly. "I tell you, my friend, that there exists not the woman who would not prefer even the Ghetto to the mountains. Women want to talk, not to fly."

Nino smiled. "You will talk to my young wife and make her happy, Padrona?"

"I? To be sure! If she is kind to me and forgives us for living as we do upon you, Nino, then I will love her, and wait on her, and make her a queen among us."

"You are good," said Nino, gratefully, and he turned back to his work.

A group of men, probably chorus-singers from the theatre, were going down the street. One of them in a ringing alto voice began to troll out with the wild Bacchanalian force of that wonderful song, "*Il segreto per esser felice!*" It was so good that Nino shouted bravo! his companions shouted bravo! Pippa clapped her hands and the windows of the houses opposite bristled with applauding heads.

"And in the country one hears only the screaming of birds. Why, one would die of it!" cried the stout little Padrona as she bustled away with the baby.

CHAPTER IX.

THE evening had set in; great purple shadows filled the valleys of Maiano: the distant tops of the hills still caught a faint yellow light as the twilight settled down.

Two sisters stood together by the old carruba tree Colomba leaned against the trunk, with her arms twined round a branch above her head. She was greatly changed. Maddalena, standing near her, shuddered as she realised how much. The good patient woman plied her distaff with nervous rapidity, and her kind homely face was full of conscious perplexity.

For the change that had come over Colomba frightened her, it frightened everyone with whom she came in contact.

It was not that the girl looked ill, she had splendid health. The brilliant colour seemed even to have increased on her cheek, as if it burnt feverishly; she had grown thin, but that did not detract from

her looks, it added to the glorious beauty of outline of brow and cheek. Her eyes looked larger, they had in them the expression which frightened her homely kindred. They burnt with a dark sombre fire, in their shape and expression was a strange tragical force. At times wild and despairing, at others they were pathetic as if appealing for help in unbearable misery, just such an expression as one might see in the appealing eyes of some tortured animal.

The untamed, uncultivated nature did not know what to make of suffering, how to bear it; her heart rose up in rebellion against it. In the triumph of magnificent health and beauty hitherto it had passed her by. No imagination had taught her through sympathy, and it was new and terrible to her.

Maddalena's nervous fingers trembled as the thin flax passed through them. "Ah, Colomba," she said with a heavy sigh, "it is of no use waiting. Do you mean to spend all the long years of your future life looking for the diligence like this?"

Colomba did not answer; still with her arms high over her head she was watching the road.

"If you would but hear reason, child."

"Reason! oh, silence! Can you not leave me alone?"

"Cola, I must speak. You shall hear me. You will kill yourself with this constant fretting, and what for? Do I not tell you—does not our father say the same—and the Signor Priore himself, that he will never come back?"

"Never come back! never!" exclaimed Colomba in so desolate a tone that the hot tears rushed into her sister's eyes.

"Do not be so miserable, child," she said; "the man is false, faithless."

"You do not know what you are speaking of," cried Colomba fiercely; "he is a gentleman!"

"Ah, but that is the misfortune. Believe me, child, he is false, he will never come back. Only be brave, face this truth and set your mind to forget him."

"He is my husband," said Colomba with clenched teeth. "You forget that, when you speak of him like this."

Maddalena shrugged her shoulders. She was kind and sympathetic, but the despairing gloom which hung over Colomba now, from morning to night, had a strangely depressing effect on the whole family, and sometimes it tried even her patience. The two brothers, Carlo and Piero, when they came home from their work in the quarries, never whistled or sang, the father was restless and irritated. Maddalena herself found nothing bright to say, and could only spin on ceaselessly; nothing could stand against that weight of sombre woe. They would all recover after Colomba left the house; a cloud seemed to disappear with her. She went daily up the road to watch and wait for the diligence to come, always with the same wild hope, always to meet the same disappointment. While she was absent chatter and

laughter resumed their sway. Once she returned in the midst of it, and though the mirth was checked and the laugh died on their lips, a hot fierce resentment blazed in the girl's great eyes. She said nothing, but every movement, every gesture seemed to ask, "What right have you to rejoice in your rough coarse lives, when on me has fallen this terrible blight—on me who have a right, an absolute right, to happiness?"

But this condition of things could not always last; the brothers became impatient of it, the father fierce and rough, the old mother cackled and scolded without ceasing, and Maddalena, the only one who dared do so, tried to remonstrate.

Colomba received her words at first with sullen silence, then with passionate scorn. The good sister, hurt and unhappy, desisted for a time, but in the peasant home everyone looked to her; she could not give it up, the household peace was too much affected by it; and when she followed her sister up to the old carruba tree, she did so with the intention of trying once more.

Maddalena spoke shrilly in her fear lest she should never have courage enough to say what she wanted to say. "Cola! Cola!" she cried, "can you not see that people will laugh at you if you go on like this, mourning for one who never loved you, but who has gone off and left you deserted and neglected like this?"

"Yes, they laugh."

"Well, but can you not throw back their mockery in their teeth? Have you no pride? Santa Maria! one would have thought that you of all people in the world would have scorned a woman who spent her life mourning and lamenting for a false lover."

"How do you know that he is false? may it not be that he is dead?" cried Colomba.

"It is possible," said Maddalena quietly, "but surely both cannot be dead; that other one, he whom your lover called Gian, he was cold and hard, but he was not heartless—no! I saw the tears in his eyes when you parted. He would have written or come to tell the news. Oh hush, Cola!" for she could hear the low-muttered curse that sounded so strangely discordant from those young red lips. "I tell you he would have come or sent. No, your lover is false, not dead."

"Leave me alone!" cried the girl; "must I always be tortured and tormented! If I have a knife in my breast, must you spend your time in driving it further in? Leave me alone, I say."

"But, Cola——"

"You will drive me mad!"

Colomba, with flashing eyes, suddenly caught hold of her sister, and passionately thrust her away. "Go, before you make me strike you," she cried.

'But you shall hear me," cried again shrilly the poor faithful kindly Maddalena. "If it were only for your sake, I would let you alone

to do as you will, my poor child; but there are the father and mother, Piero, poor Carlo. Carlo used to be gay, singing and whistling; now he is moody and rough; Piero drinks more than is good for him, and the father's temper frightens me. Say, is it just, that all these lives, four lives, should be blighted for the sake of one? Was it so with me, Cola? I was as young as you are when my poor *promesso* was killed by the blasting rocks; did I make them all unhappy?"

"You—you—what do you know of love?" cried Colomba. "You, who sat up all night till you laid his dead head in the coffin from your arms, and then went straight to your work as if nothing had happened."

"What could I do?" said Maddalena, wiping the tears from her eyes. "The work had to be done. Could I bring him to life again by my grief? Bah! Cola, you are but a child."

"I would have gone down to the rock and laid my head on the powder-flask and struck the match with my own hand, and found rest."

"But then who would have kept the house and prepared supper for the men, and fed the mules? You speak like a child. We must do our business in this world."

Colomba turned restlessly away.

"Go and leave me. You weary me! You drive me wild."

Maddalena sighed deeply. "I will go," she said; "but I want also to save you from the consequences of all this. My father and the boys are losing all patience with you, Cola."

"What does it matter to me?"

"How can you say that! You know that my father's anger is very violent when he is provoked."

"He dare not lay his hand on me!" cried the girl, her eyes flashing.

"People do not stop to reason when they are angry," said Maddalena, "and you have tried him much. Be patient with me, dear, just a little while. Oh, Cola, cannot you see the truth of what I say?"

"I wish I could get away," cried Colomba. "I wish I could get away now and altogether from this hateful place; but I cannot; he might come any day; even to-day he may be on his way. Do not shake your head, Maddalena; you will make me hate you."

"He will not come now, Cola. Believe those who have wisdom and experience. All say the same, he will never come back."

"Never come back! Never, never come back!" and her voice broke again in the wild desolate wail which gave her sister so strange a glimpse into the depths of her despair. She did not know what to say or do, but very wistfully turned away, and began slowly to go homewards, plying her distaff all the time.

Colomba took no heed of her departure. She threw herself on the

ground at the foot of the tree, and, leaning her head back against its trunk, sat waiting, as she waited day after day, to see the diligence come winding up the hill.

Maddalena crossed the village slowly, unwillingly, as if she dreaded going home. The Priore passed her as she went towards her father's house; he looked at her with kind inquiring looks, to which she replied with a mournful shake of the head. He looked disappointed, but did not stop to ask questions of her.

The Bondis' house was a little way out of the village street. There was a long low stable attached to it. Piero was carrying a great armful of fodder into the stable as Maddalena came slowly up to the door. He stopped, and, looking at her over his shoulder, gave a significant look towards the house, and shrug of the shoulders.

His sister understood the little warning, and sighed as she nodded and went in.

Old Bondi was seated by the table, and one glance at his brown wrinkled face showed her that he was in such a fit of ill-humour as they all had reason to dread.

"Where is your sister?" he shouted as Maddalena entered.

"She is coming. You are home early, father, and Piero; what brings you back at this hour?"

"Your place is to prepare my supper, but not to question me," he said angrily.

"At once! at once!" she answered, bustling about.

But he was not satisfied. "Where is Colomba?" he repeated.

The door was pushed open, and Carlo, the second son, came in, a dark slender lad of about nineteen.

"Do you ask for Colomba?" he said with a light laugh. "She is at her usual occupation, standing gazing down the road, waiting for the diligence. She is the laughing-stock of the place."

"Nonsense, Carlino!" cried Maddalena quickly. "No one dare laugh at our Cola."

"She is a fool," cried old Bondi. "And I will tell her so myself."

"Oh, father, father," cried Maddalena in distress. "Leave her to me. I will make it right, if only you give me time."

"Hold your tongue!" he cried savagely.

Carlino laughed. "It goes too far," he said. "She is not the only one they mock; it is the whole family. It wears out one's patience at last."

Maddalena cast a look of reproach at him, but the heedless boy would not see. He really had had much to put up with. She knew it and sympathised, but a feeling of blank dread stole over her. Her father's disposition was fierce and savage—Colomba had inherited it——once, some years ago, a collision had taken place between them and she had never forgotten it.

Piero came in. "The diligence horn has sounded!" he said.

"Then Colomba will come home," said Carlo mischievously.

Maddalena was rapidly placing supper on the table, trying to change the current of their thoughts. She was full of dismay at the dark sullen scowl on the old man's face, his heavy brows were knit and red, the veins stood out like whipcord on his temples.

The old mother came down the ladder-like stairs, a shrivelled-up little old woman, with scanty locks of coarse white hair escaping from the yellow handkerchief tied round her head.

"It is early," she remarked in her shrill cracked voice. "And there is much to do. See, Maddalena; the new flax has come in, and my wheels want oil, and I cannot undo the wheel myself. "Maria! what is the matter?"

The door was pushed open, and slowly, languidly, Colomba came in.

Piero gave a harsh laugh. "Another vain waiting for the diligence, sister?" he cried.

She looked at him with scornful eyes. "I do as I please," she said and would have passed by to her place; but suddenly, very roughly, old Bondi caught hold of her arm.

"That remains to be seen," he said fiercely. "Listen, Colomba! I have had enough of this pining and lamenting for a lover who is either dead or false. Do you hear? I will have no more of it."

"Let go my hand!" she exclaimed fiercely. "You hurt me!"

But he did not loosen his hold on her. "I am sick of it!" he exclaimed. "To come home is to attend a daily funeral. If you cannot be cheerful and like yourself, I will teach you better! I will bear with you no longer!"

"You dare not!" cried Colomba, her eyes blazing like living coals.

Her words exasperated him beyond endurance. On the table lay a great leather strap which Piero had brought in for repair; he seized it, and, as she faced him, he struck her furiously across the face and neck.

Fortunately the buckle missed her cheek, but it cut her neck so that the blood dyed her white shirt.

Maddalena rushed forward, catching his hands. The two lads stopped the foolish laughter with which the scene had begun, the old mother remonstrated in loud shrill chatter.

Colomba tossed away her father's hands, with a quick turn of her wrist she possessed herself of the strap.

"Coward!" she exclaimed, the word hissing through her lips.

In his fury he would have struck her again, but the two women hung upon his arms with all their weight.

Piero pushed forward. "Get out of his sight, for Heaven's sake, Cola!" he cried. "Do not stand there."

She was furious, she pushed off the hand put out in friendly remonstrance, pushed it away with such irritating violence that he fairly seized her by the shoulders and drew her outside the door. Carlo banged it to, leaving brother and sister outside.

"I hate you—I hate you! How dare you!" cried Colomba storming at her brother.

He only laughed a little ruefully, looking at the closed door.

"I want my supper," he said; "and I want peace, and if this is what one comes home to after such work as ours all day, it cannot be said to be pleasant."

"Bah!" cried Colomba. "You are all savages. Here, stop this bleeding. You do not wish me to die by my father's hand, I suppose."

The girl's colour was fading, for the blood was pouring from the wound.

"We must get help," said Piero, hastily.

He was accustomed to wounds; in his rough trade men were often hurt, and this one he knew by a quick glance was beyond his own skill.

"Come into old Lalla's house," he said.

Colomba had to summon up all her courage to overcome the strange feeling of lassitude and bewilderment that was stealing over her. She was only conscious that somehow Piero was dragging her along very quickly, that it was getting very dark. Then came acute pain, some one was hurting her unbearably. Then all sensation fled.

CHAPTER X.

"It is all right; the bleeding has stopped."

No words could adequately express the relief with which Piero heard those reassuring words. He had half led, half carried his sister into old Lalla's house, and had succeeded in laying her on the bed. Old Lalla had the reputation in the village of being a Strega, or witch. She was a clever sick-nurse, and though all the peasants were too much afraid of her supposed powers to be cordial or neighbourly to her, they were constantly obliged to appeal to her for assistance in illness or accident. She was a hideous old crone, with a small yellow face all one network of intersecting wrinkles. She knew what she was about; before asking a single question she at once set herself to stop the rush of blood, her pad and bandages were as skilfully applied as if she had been a surgeon.

"What has happened?" she asked when she had time to speak. "Who has hurt her like this, the poor lamb?"

"It was an accident."

"Ah, bah! it must have been a very peculiar accident! Young man, if this is your work there is not a maiden in Maiano who ever shall call you husband, and that I vow!"

"My work? Come, Lalla, you know me better. I would die sooner than lift my hand against a woman. If you must know, then, it is what I have long expected. You know my father's temper."

"Yes, I know the brute! Hush! she opens her eyes. Keep still, my beauty, keep still."

Slowly Colomba's magnificent eyes unclosed and looked up with a strange bewildered expression into her brother's face.

"Are you better, Cola?" he said, all his harsh ill-temper giving way.

She was still half in dreamland; she held out her arms and gave a sort of moaning cry.

"They all say it! O Maria Santissima! He will never come back!"

Piero's eyes filled with tears. "I have been harsh to her," he said, putting his hard rough hand tenderly on hers.

"Leave her alone with me," said old Lalla. "She will probably sleep; she has lost much blood, and must be greatly exhausted. You may trust her to me. Go and tell that heavy-handed brute, your father, that if he hits his mules as hard as he does his daughter, he may chance some day to lose a valuable beast."

Piero nodded. "I would rather you told him that than I," he said. "Well, if I can do no more good I will go. I have not supped."

"Yes, go; leave her with me to-night."

When the rough fellow had left the house the old woman continued her care of the wounded girl with all the tenderness of a mother. She sponged and bathed her face, arranged her softest pillows, softly smoothing back the masses of her dark hair.

Colomba was only half conscious: she did not make the least effort to raise herself. She only longed to lie quite still and give way to the overpowering sense of lassitude.

No one came in from Bondi's house. Maddalena dared not, a glance from Piero as he came in had reassured her as to her sister's safety; beyond that she could make no inquiry, so must rest satisfied.

Old Bondi's rage had tired him earlier than usual; he rolled up stairs to his bed in the attic, and Carlo followed his example.

Piero and Maddalena were left alone.

She rose eagerly and would have gone out, but her brother would not let her.

"You must not disturb her and old Lalla to-night," he said. "Lalla does not wish it, and she assured me that Cola would be all right; that she only wanted sleep."

"What are we to do?" said Maddalena seating herself with a look of despair on her face. "Cola will never forgive him; it will be defiance over and over again."

"Will not a blow like that frighten Cola?" said Piero. "It is a bad wound;" and he could not help shuddering, for the rush of blood had scared him.

She shook her head. "You do not know her," she said. "This

only was wanting to make it open war. "It is a terrible thing this wild temper of theirs."

"Meanwhile," said Piero, "I am dead tired, and to-morrow will be a heavy day. We are to begin an attack on a new part of the last quarry. The Padrone has given orders for all to be there."

"Will they blast?" said Maddalena, the colour forsaking her face.

"Yes, all is prepared."

"We shall hear the sound."

The poor woman began putting aside her spinning-wheel, bustling about to conceal the sick shiver that used to pass over her when the dull booming sound of the blasts came echoing through the valleys, reverberating from hill to hill. Years ago, when her eyes were bright and her cheeks young and fresh, that sound had come into her life; and ever after, in dreams, in imagination, in wakeful hours of the long winter nights, it came booming on her brain—the dull knell of the dead man who had loved her so well.

Piero went off to bed with a long yawn, and Maddalena stood long at the window, looking out with dim eyes, before she followed his example.

(*To be continued.*)

WILL SHE COME?

FAIN would I know when over me
Snowflakes are falling,
And cold birds on the aspen-tree
Are faintly calling—
If she will come some eventide
And kneel the lonely grave beside.

If she will tread where violets lie,
Sweet Spring returning,
And bring me thyme and rosemary
And rue for mourning,
To garland the neglected stone
With moss and lichen overgrown.

If she will feel a tear-drop start
Whilst winds are sighing,
And softly say—Rest, loving heart—
True heart here lying.
Ah! surely she will come some day!
None else for me will weep or pray.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

CHILD OR WOMAN?

I.

DRIP, drip, drip! splashed the rain from the sloping roofs of a group of farm buildings situated in one of the counties of Ireland. The damp mist rising from the ground met the rain and caused a double envelope of moisture to some twenty feet above the surface. The feet of a horse fell leadenly on the road, sounding more and more distinct. The heavy torrents had washed away the mud and sand from the roadway and thus had caused large holes to appear at intervals. The man who was holding the reins slackened speed, as the dim outline of the farm became visible. "Poor beast, he's about done!" he remarked.

His companion uttered a guttural grunt, which might mean anything, perhaps relief at the near prospect of seeing a fire, as human habitation denoted fuel of some sort. The horse stopped, thereby indicating it had come to an obstacle of some sort. "There must be a gate. Take the reins, father, I'll soon see," exclaimed the driver, springing down and immediately sinking in mud and mire above the tops of his boots. He contrived to open the gate and hang on to the horse's head somehow, until he had landed the whole concern high and dry on the cobble-stones of the yard.

Inadvertently leaning forward to knock at the farm-house door, he received a waterspout down the back of his neck from a leaking pipe. His knocks producing no effect, he groped his way along the wall and peered into an unshuttered window. The room was a long low sanded kitchen; the glowing remains of a peat fire indicated that it was not deserted. So far reassured, Captain Douglas Empton knocked again. A window opened above and a voice demanded information about the new-comers. The old man who still sat in the hired gig found his tongue. "It's me—Mr. Empton, your landlord. Let us in, can't you?"

Steps came down the creaking stairs, light steps that fell faintly, and Douglas, who had stationed himself at the window, saw a dark figure, a little black wisp of a figure, obscure for a moment the ruddy firelight.

"It is only your landlord," he said, as he entered the now open door. As he glanced at the little girl, however, he saw that there was no trace of fear or surprise or any other emotion written on that passive little face. "Come in," she said almost in a whisper.

"I must look after the horse," he began; but before he could add more she had darted past him into the grey mist. He began to think of gnomes; but as he turned to follow her, she was again at his side, with the drops of rain on her raven dark hair and moisture perceptible on the old black dress.

"Micky will see to the horse," she whispered.

Douglas laid his strong white hand on her shoulder; he felt the bony little frame vibrating after the swift movement. "Why did you not tell me where to find Micky?" he asked kindly; "you are quite wet."

A little gleam of surprise flashed for a moment into the weird eyes, but she turned away without replying.

Mr. Empton found his way to the fire. "Hallo you! I suppose you are poor Howith's daughter. Where's your mother, eh?"

"I am Aileen Howith." There was an unconscious dignity in the words.

Mrs. Howith was not long in making her appearance. Though it was barely nine o'clock, it was evident that the household had retired to rest. Mutual explanations were given. Mr. Empton's letter had never reached the widow of his late tenant. He had come down to see about the stock being sold, and the rent owing to himself secured. The fact that his tenant had been foully murdered by Irish ruffians disturbed him little, except that, as he phrased it, "it would be cussed difficult to find another tenant."

Douglas sank on the settle by the fire and watched Aileen set out tumblers and cold beef for the visitors' refreshment. She moved swiftly and noiselessly. "What a plain little face she had," he thought, almost completing the circle and becoming attractive in its excessive ugliness. She could hardly be more than fourteen years, and yet she looked as if some blight had fallen on her. Her large dark eyes seemed to be set by mistake in a face several sizes too small for them.

The travellers were requested to make themselves comfortable for the night in the kitchen by the addition of rugs and blankets, and then the bustling faded widow and her daughter withdrew. Douglas sprang up and opened the door for them, and Mrs. Howith returned his "good-night" courteously; Aileen only looked reproachfully at him. How had the little creature learnt already to be so sparing of words?

Mr. Howith's affairs were in terrible confusion, and required an amount of unravelling that occupied his widow and landlord for several days. This business was carried on chiefly in the parlour, and meantime Douglas enjoyed the company of "the gnome," as he called her, in the kitchen. For several evenings she came and sat opposite to him, upright and motionless, with folded hands. He found the silence oppressive, and tried to "draw" her; but for a long time his attempts were met by monosyllables or dead silence. One night, looking up from his pipe with a friendly smile, he inquired her age.

"I am not sure—about fifteen," she replied, monotonously.

"Not sure?" he echoed.

With an effort she withdrew her gaze from the caverns of the fire, and looked at him. "I am an orphan," she said; "Mrs. Howith is

only my step-mother." The answer aroused in her such painful thoughts, that she shivered. Douglas had sometimes wondered if she lived in a world of vacancy; he wondered no longer now. There were great thoughts in that small head, yearning for utterance; but the hammer of sorrow had beaten all expression from the metal, and left them only to peer through the windows of the eyes with a pleading earnestness, like a dumb brute's.

He made another attempt.

"Aileen," he asked, "are you not afraid to live here with only your step-mother?"

There was a pause. He saw the narrow chest heave a moment and the thin lips tighten, ere she answered quietly: "Nothing matters now."

He knew her answer had reference to her father, and he formed a sudden resolve to break down the barriers of her reserve. He was sure it would relieve her to pour out her sorrow to some one. She seemed to him the most pitiable spectacle he had ever seen. So he began: "Does your great loss make so much difference to you?"

She rose quietly and walked away.

"Aileen!" he cried, "forgive me. Come back and I promise I won't speak again!"

It was of no use; slowly and sadly she left him. The poor little child's heart was overcharged with pain. She had come into life unwanted. Her father was an outcast from his native land, Poland. Her mother was English. Together they had been hunted from place to place, and on one dark and stormy night, they stepped on board a little sailing vessel. The night was wild and tempestuous, and in the scene of terror and dismay little Aileen was prematurely born.

In the grey cold dawn of the morning, a widower stepped ashore with the mite of a baby in his arms. He could hardly bear to look at the child which had cost him the life of his passionately loved wife. The babe was placed out to nurse, and for a wonder, lived. Ten years after, the father called for her, and carried the little girl off to Ireland, to live alone with him, till three years later he married again. The preternaturally grave little girl gave her full heart to her stern, undemonstrative father, and laboured day and night to please him. He hardly noticed her, and it was only a year before his death that the barriers between father and daughter were broken down and they became inseparable. The second wife was merely regarded as a kind housekeeper; her services earned her a home, and she neither comprehended nor wished to comprehend husband or daughter. Then this awful crushing blow had fallen on poor Aileen, changing her happiness, a feeble little flower, into bitter silent sorrow.

A child born with a pessimist nature, out of which a tiny root of joy had began to spring only to be nipped in the bud. Her heart was numb with anguish, and Douglas's tender pity had begun to awaken it, and cause it to tingle again. By degrees the genial sun-

shine of his presence thawed her further. One day he found her sitting on the settle, caressing his wire-haired terrier, Fig. Fig occupied a large share of his master's heart, and as little Aileen stroked his stiff hair, a strange sympathy with the master sprang up in her, and at last Captain Empton fairly broke down her coldness.

"Aileen," he asked, "why did your father choose this wretched hole to live in?"

"He had reasons for not wishing to be noticed. And at first it was not bad here. Then all the cows died of a disease, and he could not pay the rent. The rents were being lowered at all the farms round, but his wasn't, and men came and said if he went on paying the high rents, they would make him suffer; but what could he do? He'd have been glad enough."

A glow of indignation shot through Douglas—this child's father had been the victim of his own father's love of money.

"We heard stories," continued Aileen, "of the horrors going on around, and Mrs. Howith hung round father's neck and begged him to give notice, or he would be shot. Oh those horrors!"

She put her hands before her eyes as if to shut out some dreadful sight.

"Don't think of them," said Douglas, more moved than he would have cared to confess.

"But I must! I see them! On a farm near here, I went one morning, and there was a woman lying on the bare ground with all her little children round her, and her husband bleeding to death, from being shot in the thigh, because he had taken a house from which a man had been evicted. It was so dreadful! I can see her eyes now, fixed and staring; she was mad, and she screamed and flung the baby on the ground and cried, but there were no tears. She couldn't really cry. And the poor little children!—oh, the poor little children!"

"My child, you mustn't think of these things; you are trembling all over," said Douglas, gently.

"I must;" she spoke quietly enough, but her eyes glowed, and her hands burnt feverishly. "I am like that woman, I want to cry and I can't, it's all dried up. I never cried when the black-faced men came in at the door; I never cried when father fell stone dead, shot like an animal; nor when all the poor goats next day were chopped up in little bits in the yard. Do you know why they did it? Because he would pay the rent he had agreed on. He was dreadfully poor himself, but he would do it, and he was so brave, he didn't care for what the men said; he always hoped for better times, and then came the end. Is it the end?" she asked in her strange half whisper. "Do you think so?"

Douglas Empton was not an irreligious man; his faith was simple, so he answered frankly:

"No, Aileen, indeed I do not think so. When one considers how short and, in many cases, full of misery life is, I think each one can

answer from his own soul he was made for something better than this. Ask me anything that puzzles you, and I will try to help you."

She rose up suddenly and grasped his hand in her hot little fingers as she hurried from the room to conceal the scalding drops that had at last risen to her eyes. Very few they were though; she had forgotten how to cry.

It was the evening following this, that Douglas Empton suddenly missed his dog. He went out to inquire if Micky had seen him. There was a full moon, and light clouds were racing across the sky, leaving chasms of slate-grey between them in which the stars glittered. Aileen followed him.

"Doesn't a night like this make you feel quiet?" she whispered. "As if nothing *could* matter that happened to little us."

"You are a poet, Aileen," he replied, smiling.

The moon shone out brilliantly as the ragged cloud that had concealed it flew onward. Captain Empton took a step forward.

"There's Fig," he said. "Come here, old dog!"

There was Fig leaning against the cowbyre-wall opposite, in the shadow; or rather what remained of him. Stiff and upright, fixed in the attitude of begging, his pretty white hair flecked and hued with blood, his throat cut right across, a battered top hat on his head, and scrawled in horrid mockery on the wall above:

"The Landlord."

An exclamation broke from Douglas as he cut the cord and released the body. In his tone was a concentration of sorrow and vengeance. He picked up the dog in his arms; he forgot Aileen's presence; forgot everything but his desire for vengeance as he stood beneath the great grey heights of the cloudy sky. Poor stiff little corpse! such a short time ago so full of life, and love, and trust. Pitilessly stern was Captain Empton. He carried the dog's remains to an out-house, and returned to pass the rest of the evening in moody silence. Not even his silent little comforter could guess how deep a wound had been inflicted, how utterly sick at heart he felt.

II.

Aileen's womanhood had come upon her in her first knowledge of love. Yes, she realised that Captain Empton was to her a king among men. She worshipped him, she would have died for him. She never hoped for a return; to be allowed to wait upon him filled her cup of contentment. Now the time of his departure was drawing near, and she was filled with a vague sense of intolerable pain.

At dinner-time she did not appear, and Mrs. Howith pleaded a headache as an excuse. The child had simply said, "I want no dinner," and wandered out alone. Captain Empton had driven to

the town ten miles distant, and would not be home for some hours. Aileen felt new sensations crowding in upon her, so solitude became a necessity. She was restless; her sensitive nerves quivered and terror seized her, the shrinking from coming pain.

She wandered on along the muddy road, under the dull canopy of grey sky, and then she stopped and rested her hand on the cold wall of rough stones that bordered it. All life seemed to her a hideous dream, from which she could not awake. She panted as she remembered there was another world of light and colour where men and women were free. For a long time she rested her throbbing head on the wall. Life was too sore to be borne.

Suddenly she looked up and saw the grey clouds lowering over her, and the long road behind her, and a sense of personal insecurity came upon her. She was far from home and she heard voices. In another moment the speakers would turn a sharp corner and come down the hill in front upon her.

Fear nerved her. Lightly she sprang over the wall on to the marshy ground beyond and crouched down. She could see through a chink in the loose stones two rough men. They stopped abruptly, just opposite to where the child was cowering, and seemed to be looking for something on the road. She could not hear what they said.

After some reconnoitring they placed something in the wheel tracks and covered it with loose sand and pebble, so that it could not be distinguished. They consumed some time in doing this, but on this lonely road no one interrupted them. Then they passed on.

Aileen was seized with sudden trembling when she saw them stop thirty yards further down, and leisurely mount the opposite wall. They ensconced themselves on the grass behind it, clearly intending to remain there. There was no way of escape. Even if she ventured to crouch along under the wall there were numerous gaps, some two or three yards in width, where she would be at once seen. She was condemned to remain there as long as they did.

Aileen had once been termed in the merciful language of the poor an "innocent." If having thoughts too large for the brain, which sometimes fly through disconnected and half realised for want of stamina to complete them, is being innocent, very possibly she was so.

It sometimes seemed as if she was mentally short-sighted; the images on her mental retina fell beyond the power of her grasp and only appeared blurred and dim. She never wondered why the men had placed something in the road and waited for the effect; dumb terror took away the power of reasoning.

It was, perhaps, an hour she remained there, for she had lost the sense of time. Now and then she saw one of the men peer over the wall, and their subdued voices reached her ears.

Suddenly she awoke to life once more by hearing wheels. Perhaps

it was Captain Empton returning, and he would take her home; she would not be afraid of showing herself if he were there. She watched between the walls and steep banks for the horse's head to appear at the top of the little hill.

Then all at once in a flash came upon her the meaning of the riddle. He would trot full speed down the little hill, the men had spread some explosive on the road. There would be a crash, and death, and terror.

Her nerves seemed to give way, she was paralyzed. The trap appeared and the man in it. Half-way down the hill they spun. "Captain Empton!" she screamed suddenly, in a choking screech, and she was over the wall and tearing across the road straight at his horse's head.

With all his might Douglas hung on the reins as her mad face came before him. The animal was almost on its haunches, but the impetus was too great. It slid on its fore-feet. Something within Aileen seemed to burst, there was a singing in her ears. She was down right across the road, and the horse's cruel shoes had spurned her further. The animal had not meant to strike the child, it made a swerve aside, and now stood trembling all over.

Douglas was on the ground in a moment, and picked the light little body up in his arms. One of the hands hung limply down; there was a bruise on the forehead, either from a stone or the forefoot of the horse. Aileen was dead; it needed no doctor to proclaim that. The child spirit, too large for the frail body that it tenanted, had easily riven its fetters and floated away.

The plot had failed. The wheels had missed the dynamite altogether in their swerve to one side. Pat and Mick ruefully collected it again when the captain was well out of sight.

That chapter in Captain Empton's life was closed. Without a thought that Aileen's life had been given for his, he deeply and sincerely mourned for her. As he forced himself to speak of the occurrence to his father, he explained it on a supposition of his own.

"Poor little soul! I always thought that sorrow had unhinged her mind, and now I know it. I saw the mad look on her face as she sprang from behind the wall. It is enough to make the veriest scoffer believe in future retribution, when one thinks of the suffering endured by little Aileen."

His voice broke suddenly, and he turned abruptly away.

HOPE.

A HUNDRED bards have sung the praise of Hope,
And vowed to all the virtues she's related;
With such eccentric zeal 'tis vain to cope,
But I pronounce the baggage over-rated.

Just glance one moment in a candid mood,
Unchecked, unbiassed by the fear of stricture
From those who call her everything that's good,
Upon another aspect of the picture.

A jack o' lantern, luring men astray;
Or at the best a most erratic lady,
Who loves to show her friends a sunny way,
And coolly leaves them on the side that's shady.

This prank the jade has served me many a time;
Up hill, down dale we've had the wildest dances;
Until, grown somewhat portly in my prime,
I'm getting rather tired of her advances.

"Hope told a flattering tale," now here's the truth
From one who knew her promises are brittle;
"White-handed Hope," the poet sings forsooth,
Perhaps remembering she does so little.

'Twas Hope would have it that a pretty witch
(Tom's bride to-day) to marry me was willing;
'Twas Hope declared, "Your aunt will make you rich,"
Who dying cut me off without a shilling.

Indeed, I must acknowledge, after all,
From pure vexation springs this lay disjointed;
The reason why I've dipped my pen in gall
To write on Hope, is that I'm disappointed.

SYDNEY GREY.

"Pick up my roses, please, Grandfather."

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1893.

MR. WARRENNE:

MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NOT MAUD!

"AND where may you be going this morning, Master Dick?" said Mr. Scudamore.

This was his invariable question every morning after breakfast; and the invariable answer was, in a tone as if it did not signify at all which way he went.

"I think I shall ride up to Erlsmede, and just look in on the Warrennes."

Then Mr. Scudamore always smiled at his sister, and she made a face and shrugged her shoulders.

"And I suppose when he has looked in on the Warrennes a little longer," said Mrs. Thorne, "he will make up his mind as to which of the two girls he likes best."

"*Which of the two!*" said Mr. Scudamore, as if that could admit of no doubt whatever.

"I *have* made up my mind," said Captain Scudamore.

"Oh, you have—have you!" said Mrs. Thorne; "then perhaps some day or other you will pluck up a spirit and let the young lady know your intention, or else—here we are at the end of April—time goes so fast that you won't have settled it at all before you have to go back again. These young men! It was very different when I was a girl! If a man liked you, he told you so, and there was an end of the matter."

"Eh, Dick! what's the difficulty?" said Mr. Scudamore, turning his chair round, so as to gain a view of his son's perplexed face.

"I have not yet found courage to ask her to share my fortunes; that's all," said Captain Scudamore. "It seems to me a tolerably

cool demand for a man to ask any woman to leave a happy home to follow him to an unhealthy climate, involving, as it does, so total a separation from her family and friends; but when she is so utterly helpless, so absolutely dependent on those around her for her daily comforts——"

"Why, really, Dick!" said Mr. Scudamore, unable to keep silence any longer, "if ever there was a woman in this world thoroughly able to help herself under all circumstances, that woman is Maud Warrenne!"

"Maud! It is Alice whom I love!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Mrs. Thorne.

"Whom I loved from the first moment I saw her!" he added with vehemence.

Mr. Scudamore sat perfectly silent, stunned by this piece of information. Dick walked up and down the room, and Mrs. Thorne sat rubbing her hands, and turning her bright eyes from one to another.

At last Mr. Scudamore, glancing compassionately at his son, as if he considered him a decided lunatic, and drawing his chair nearer his sister, said to her in an undertone:

"But what does the boy mean? He can't mean to marry her! he can't really be in love, you know, with that poor dear blind doll!"

But if he expected a coadjutor in Mrs. Thorne he was mistaken; she adored Dick, and would by no means hear of his being thwarted in his choice.

"He shall have which he pleases!" she retorted. "If he likes the little one best, he shall have her. Little and good! What! I suppose everybody does not want a tall wife, do they? As Fanny said to John Maitland: 'What's the use of your coming here day after day, boring me about your carriage and your horses, when I tell you that I like your brother best?' Blind! I never thought she was blind! And if she is, God made her, she did not make herself. You are like the man in the play, who says to his son's friend, 'Here are two ladies; *you* shall choose; only Bob shall choose first!' Dick shall choose, shall he? when you won't let him have the little one!"

From this volley Mr. Scudamore was glad to escape; he did not know what on earth to say: there merely remained in his head a vague idea that a blind woman could not mend her husband's shirts. But he was too distracted to attempt anything like argument on the subject, so, after passing his hand over his forehead two or three times, he looked for his hat and stick, and addressing his son, who was still disconsolately pacing the room, he said:

"You stop here till I come back. I'm going up to Erlsmede to talk it over, and it will be a good thing if I'm the only one of the party who has made a blunder in the business."

With these words he set off resolutely towards Mr. Warrenne's

house, determined to seek an interview with Maud, and have the matter clearly explained. He feared that she might have interpreted his son's constant visits as he had done—he feared that Dick did not know his own mind—he feared that Alice would not return his son's regard; in short, his thoughts had never been in such a tumult since he could recollect. He hardly knew that he had reached the green gate of the Warrennes' garden, till he heard the laughing voice of Maud exclaiming:

"Eh, grandfather! you look as if you had all the cares of the world upon you this morning! All well at the Woodlands? Stop till I undraw the bolt."

She was alone, that was a comfort. She had been gathering China roses from the south wall into her straw hat, which often served her for a flower-basket, and the hand she held out to him was wet with dew.

"Well, but nothing is the matter, I hope, grandfather," she said, as she closed the gate behind him.

"Why, Queen Maud, I've made a terrible mistake—I'm almost in despair," replied Mr. Scudamore.

"But that's a pity, grandfather," said Maud; "because *I* have made one or two mistakes in my life, and I should not wonder if papa had done so too, occasionally—when he was young, you know; so that you find yourself in good company, and need not grow desperate."

"I don't think I shall ever get over it," said Mr. Scudamore; "I may fairly say that I was never so astonished in my life."

Maud, with her straw hat half full of roses, and holding it by the strings, leaned against the garden gate. Mr. Scudamore, his hands resting on the top of his stick, stood before her. She surveyed him from head to foot with her brightest glance.

"If you had but a cloak thrown over one shoulder, and a broad-leafed hat, grandfather," said she, "you would look very like the Italian count whose wife and child have just been carried up into the mountain by the bandits! Foot a little more out, and arms folded, I should recommend; but the face is admirable—fit for R—— Theatre, without a single touch of burnt cork!"

"You plague!" said Mr. Scudamore, relaxing into a smile.

"You can't frighten me, grandfather, if you mean that," said Maud. "Alice and papa are both safe indoors; and I had a letter from Leonard this morning, in high health and spirits, dated Rome."

And diving her fingers among the roses, she drew out the letter from the crown of her hat and held it up with an air of triumph.

"You know," said Mr. Scudamore, "what I always thought of you, Maud. You know I always admired you more than anybody in the world."

He was growing serious. Maud, who hated to show emotion, tried to laugh it off.

"Dear me, grandfather; if you were but twenty—thirty say—*forty* years younger," said she, archly, "how nervous such a declaration would make me!"

"I know what your disposition is," he continued, still more earnestly, "and I should have thought your beauty would have spoken for itself."

Maud made a little courtesy.

"I am not famous for concealing my thoughts," said Mr. Scudamore, "and *you know* that when my son came over to see me, the only thing wanting to complete my happiness was that he should make you my daughter."

Maud coloured deep crimson over neck and brow. She could not deny that, however far the idea had been from her own thoughts, she was well aware it was very constantly in his. As soon as she could find her voice, she said:

"Instead of which, dear grandfather, you find that you are obliged to put up with having me for a granddaughter; the thing is not so very different. It is but one step removed."

"I could not love you better," said Mr. Scudamore, looking admiringly at her; "but I'm vexed to death, I acknowledge. I hoped it would have been otherwise—I thought he could not have helped himself."

"And you have been all this time finding it out, grandfather?" said Maud, laughing. "Any other person could not have been five minutes in our company without discovering that we regarded each other merely as very good friends."

"I could not believe it—I could not think it possible," said Mr. Scudamore, "that he should pass *you* by, and insist, like a madman, on marrying poor little Alice!"

"Alice!" said Maud, dropping her hat.

"Alice!" replied Mr. Scudamore, distinctly.

There was a very long pause. At last, Maud said in a calm tone, as if matters had grown very desperate indeed:

"Pick up my roses, please, grandfather."

Mr. Scudamore obeyed. Maud collected the roses in her hand, put on her hat and tied it. Still silent. She could not collect her ideas on the subject. Mr. Scudamore was half afraid she was feeling more than she liked to own. And, perhaps, so perverse is the nature of woman on these points, she would rather have had to refuse Captain Scudamore than to find that he had entirely overlooked her in favour of another.

At last she managed to say:

"Well, grandfather, what are we going to do next?"

"That's the thing," said Mr. Scudamore.

"You are come to ask my advice, very properly," remarked Maud. "Let us think about it. Does Alice know it?

"Ah! does she?" said Mr. Scudamore.

"*I* am taken by surprise," said Maud; "she may be equally so."

"She wouldn't think of marrying?" said he, hesitating.

"Oh, goodness no!" replied Maud with confidence. "Of course not!"

"Dick is perfectly frantic," said Mr. Scudamore.

"Foolish!" retorted Maud.

"Why, you see, Queen Maud, you don't know what it is yet," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I quite agree with you there," returned Maud—"nor Alice either."

"So I thought—so I told Dick," said Mr. Scudamore. "Why, she's a child—just out of the nursery!"

"Very true, grandfather."

"And then—blind!"

"True again," said Maud, sighing.

"Shall I tell your father?" he asked.

"Certainly! Let's have no secrets," replied Maud.

"What I'm to do about Dick, I don't know," said Mr. Scudamore.

Maud was silent. She had some misgivings as to what she was to do about Alice.

"If they have taken a fancy to each other, you know, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore, as they walked towards the house, "why, there's only one thing for it."

"What's that, grandfather?" asked Maud.

"To make the best of it," he returned.

"Oh! that, of course!" said Maud. "But what else?"

"Why, to marry them."

"Alice marry!" exclaimed Maud.

"Yes, if Dick has set his heart upon it," replied Mr. Scudamore with perfect simplicity.

"That does not follow," replied Maud.

"Should you not like him for a brother?" asked Mr. Scudamore.

"Oh, vastly! Not so well as Leonard, though," she answered.

Mr. Scudamore began to whistle.

"Why, there's papa just going out of the gates," said Maud.

"Then our interview is postponed, and I'm not sorry for it," said Mr. Scudamore; "let's go in and see the child."

"This way, grandfather," said Maud, pushing open the door.

"Alice, my dear—why, the deuce! Queen Maud, here's Dick!"

"Is there, grandfather?" said Maud, darting past him into the room.

Alice rose, all trembling; Maud ran to her, and took her in her arms.

"What on earth brought you here?" asked Mr. Scudamore; "didn't I tell you to stop till I came back?"

"How could I stop?" replied Captain Scudamore.

"When will you learn to do as you are bid?" retorted Maud.

"Come, give me your good wishes," said Captain Scudamore.

"With all my heart," said Maud, accepting his offered hand; "and let me tell you, you have a much quieter bargain than if——" She paused, blushed a little, and turned to Alice.

"She likes the idea of travelling! She will go to India with me! She has not a fear—not a drawback!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore, with the greatest animation, leading his father a little on one side.

"A pretty fellow you are, to turn young ladies' heads in this way!" said Mr. Scudamore, highly delighted. Then going up to Alice, he added:

"Alice, my dear love, we must talk it over very prudently. We must not be in a hurry; we must hear what your father says."

"Come, you two, go away," said Maud, who saw that Alice trembled more and more every minute, and who did not know what her agitation would come to at last. "Papa is gone out, and you can do nothing more; and I'm sure nobody wants you here."

"What time will Mr. Warrenne return?" asked Captain Scudamore.

"Seldom much before dinner-time," said Maud. "Come in the evening."

After a good deal of leave-taking, she succeeded in turning out the visitors.

"I wonder whether I'm in my senses," said Maud, who, still sitting on the sofa, with her sister's head resting on her shoulder, was caressing the long wild tendrils of her hair. "I declare, a few minutes ago in the garden, I told Mr. Scudamore that it was altogether impossible that you could—you understand—care for Dick; but the moment I came in, and saw your face, I felt it all in a moment. I must have been stupidly blind before."

"Maud," said Alice, in a faint voice, "do you think papa will consent?"

"Why, dear Alice, he will only have one thought in the matter—your happiness—whichever way he determines."

"Then he will consent," said Alice, calmly; "or, else I shall die."

Maud looked a little frightened at this announcement, but presently thinking it was only the way lovers talked (who were hitherto a perfectly unknown species to her), she recovered her spirits.

"I'll tell you what; as to your going to India it is out of the question," said Maud; "we must keep Dick in England."

"But he must give up everything if he remains here," said Alice; "that would be too much to ask."

"He *ought* to give up everything for you," said Maud confidently.

"But how is he to live without his profession?" asked Alice.

"Oh! we must think about that," said Maud, "we can't think of everything at once."

"And you *do* like him, Maud?" said Alice.

"Extremely," replied Maud; "it is only a good thing that I don't like him too much.'

"How I am to live till the evening!" said Alice, moving restlessly on the sofa.

Maud, who could no more comprehend her sister's feelings than if she had expressed them in high Dutch, did her best, however, to relieve them. She offered to read to her, to play to her; she tried to induce her to take up her work. But all in vain. Alice passed a wretched morning, her nervous restlessness growing worse every half hour.

Mr. Warrenne came in just before dinner. He talked but little at dinner-time; but his mind was frequently preoccupied, and his silence did not seem ominous to the girls.

When the cloth was removed, Alice grew paler and paler, expecting every moment that Captain Scudamore would be announced.

Her suspense was ended, however, by her father coming to sit beside her on the sofa, and saying:

"Alice, my dear, I had a visit from Captain Scudamore just before dinner, which I would not mention to you, but that I understand you are already acquainted with his preference. It was an ill-advised thing, my dear child, on his part, to let matters go so far without ascertaining whether it was possible that they could ultimately be brought about."

"Papa!" whispered Alice.

Her shortening breath terrified Maud, who looked imploringly at her father, but he seemed to judge it best to go on.

"You are hardly seventeen, my dear," he pursued; "and in such an important case it is needful that I should decide for you. I have the highest esteem and regard for Captain Scudamore, and had his choice fallen elsewhere (he glanced at Maud), I should have offered no opposition to his wishes. But picture to yourself your desolation in a distant country—strange manners, and a strange language around you, perhaps in circumstances of distress or danger—a helpless condition for any woman, but with your affliction, nothing could excuse a parent for exposing you to such a chance."

"*With him?*" faltered Alice.

"I have expressed my high opinion of him," said Mr. Warrenne; "but remember, my dear child, that he would not always remain a lover. He would naturally seek amusement in society; the more so as your deprivation would render yours more monotonous than that of most women; you would have the anguish of knowing that his enjoyments were more and more apart from you; and the torture of the completest and most helpless ignorance added to the trials: even in company with him, you would not be able to *see* how he was going on; you would be the prey to a thousand fancies which your judgment would not have the power to correct."

Alice attempted to form some words, but the power of utterance was gone. Her pallor increased, and her breath grew still shorter.

"And then, Alice," continued her father, "in a country where life is proverbially uncertain, I cannot but revert to the possibility of your losing him. In such a case, at a distance perhaps from any Europeans, your situation would be too frightful. Your means of obtaining information being so limited, you would be utterly without defence or resource. I repeat it, no parent would be justified in exposing his child to such a situation!"

All at once her breath stopped. She fell back in her father's arms. Maud uttered a cry of terror; but Mr. Warrenne, lifting her up gently, said:

"We had better get her to bed at once, my dear Maud—light me a candle—it has been a very ill-advised proceeding on the part of the young man."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. REYNOLDS IS DELIGHTED.

It was impossible for Florence wholly to dislike her mother-in-law however keenly she might feel her usurpation, for the kind familiarity of her manners, and her attention to the little wants of those around her, made her almost infallibly popular. If Mr. Reynolds had shared this amiable peculiarity of his wife's, he might have won the affection and confidence of his daughter; but there was a deficiency of quick feeling about him that obscured his better qualities. A little care devoted to the securing for her a few privileges and indulgences might have been well bestowed, and would have much diminished the mortifying sense she entertained of her position in the family. She was excessively fond of riding, and there was no horse provided for her, because Mrs. Reynolds never rode on horseback; she loved the Opera, and Mr. Reynolds never once thought of taking her, because late hours and crowded assemblies were expressly forbidden to Mrs. Reynolds in her present state of health, for it was generally understood in the household that it was the intention of Mrs. Reynolds some day to add to the somewhat motley junior branches of the family. The heavy and splendid dinner-parties, which were the medium by which Mr. Reynolds and his friends enjoyed each other's society, usually concluded by half-past ten. They were entirely composed of ladies and gentlemen of a certain age; there was no music, no flirting; and Florence was always the most insignificant person in the company.

Such was the life which she had led during the month they had passed in town, and already it began to tell upon her health; her dazzling complexion was becoming paler, and she was oppressed by a feeling of *ennui*, to which she had been a comparative stranger, even

in the dull retirement of Erlsmede. Mrs. Creswick's letters became now to her a matter of pleasurable anticipation; she had learned the value of her aunt's friendship, she spoke to her with confidence of her own trials and annoyances, and received from her in return both sympathy and advice. She even began, though with some incredulity as to its beneficial effects, to adopt one of her aunt's suggestions with regard to her style of reading. Instead of depending solely on the contents of the circulating library for her mental exercises, she procured, very privately, one or two elementary works on history. Fortunately she had a very wide field before her, since her ignorance was absolutely without limits, and she was gradually becoming aware of the fact. Her father's stern reproofs had not been thrown away upon her; she felt that they were deserved, and, to a certain extent, it became her intention to supply her deficiencies. And well has Dr. Arnold declared that the intellectual is a step to moral improvement. No sooner did she begin systematically to *think*, than it occurred to her that her life for a long time past had been very base, and, strange as the assertion may appear, her first clear conceptions about the Saxon Heptarchy were a good deal interwoven with reflections upon her own want of integrity and moral dignity of principle. This gradual improvement was, of course, absolutely invisible to those who daily associated with her, and to whom such a change should have been most welcome. To Mr. Reynolds she appeared, as before, a heartless and ignorant young woman; and to Mrs. Reynolds, "a sweetly pretty creature, who she was quite sure would marry beautifully one day!"

One morning Mrs. Reynolds announced to her that they were going to have a large dinner-party that very day, and that she had done herself the pleasure of ordering Florence a blue silk dress for the occasion. It was a remarkably beautiful silk, and Florence, although she was paler than her wont, looked very lovely in it. But, while receiving the compliments of her mother-in-law with all due acknowledgments, she felt that it was a matter of perfect indifference to her how she dressed or looked in such society as that of her father's ordinary guests. She took her seat, therefore, in her accustomed corner, as much out of the way as possible, answered the few salutations that were addressed to her almost without looking up, and fell into a reverie concerning her studies of the morning until dinner should be announced. She was startled by hearing a voice, perfectly familiar to her, saying to her step-mother:

"You were always out. I began to think you did it on purpose."

"Oh! Good gracious, Mr. Reynolds, do you hear what Mr. Courtenay says?" said Mrs. Reynolds, leaning from her arm-chair towards her husband. "I, who never deny myself to anybody!"

"Mr. Courtenay is jesting," said Mr. Reynolds, gravely. "He knows that the son of my old friend would be a welcome guest to both of us."

"I want to see your children," said Mr. Courtenay. "Ada writes me that they are very beautiful."

"And you like children?"

"Excessively!"

"Goodness, how I shall like to show you mine! They *are* pretty; but I won't have you expect too much. Your sweet cousin was partial in her account."

Mr. Courtenay's only reply to this remark was an ironical smile, which might be interpreted as meaning "Very likely."

"I am having a miniature painted of my two darlings," said Mrs. Reynolds. "They were so *very* good this morning, their first sitting—did you not think so, dearest Florence?"

"Yes. I was surprised to find them so quiet," said Florence, calmly.

Mr. Courtenay turned and bowed to her. Mr. Reynolds said, with something of hesitation and constraint, which went through her heart, for it looked as if he was ashamed of her:

"Are you acquainted with my daughter, Courtenay?"

"Oh, perfectly! An acquaintance of long standing, is it not, Miss Reynolds?"

Florence bowed and made no answer. She was determined that her father should not accuse her of flirting with Mr. Courtenay.

"I don't think London agrees with dear Florence, or with any one of us," said Mrs. Reynolds, looking up at Courtenay. "I shall be quite glad when we change the air."

"It seems to me one of the foibles of the age to fancy that places don't agree with people," said Mr. Reynolds. "I have no faith in the idea. Unless there is something destructive to life in the atmosphere, I imagine that health is very little dependent upon situation."

"It must be a very fragile state of health, I should suppose," said Mr. Courtenay, to whom the remark was addressed. "I imagine that it is change of scene and not of air, which usually works the cure; but as I am never ill myself, I am a bad judge of the influence of climate upon the feelings."

"It is surprising how little gentlemen understand of these things," said Mrs. Reynolds; "now I absolutely expire in a bracing air. I mean to grow young again in Italy!"

"You must grow old first," said Mr. Courtenay, gallantly.

Dinner was announced—the company paired off, and Florence saw no more of Mr. Courtenay till the evening.

She looked for his reappearance in the drawing-room with some degree of curiosity. She *did* think that she had made some little impression upon his flinty feelings—it was provoking to find him meet her with such perfect coolness; she wondered whether he meant to keep it up all the evening—she thought she would—not flirt with him—oh! no, she had left off flirting—but just see if she could not bring him to his senses. He came in, looked for Mrs. Reynolds, and

going straight up to her, asked her to sing. She complied good-naturedly, and having tuned her guitar, threw back her clustering black curls and began in her peculiar low sweet voice to chant one of the old Spanish ballads. Courtenay, seated beside her, seemed to give himself up to the music—he begged for another song. Mrs. Reynolds complied; received his praises with a laugh, and handed him her instrument that he might put it away into its case.

The case was close to an ottoman, near which Florence was seated. She opened the lid for him, and said, with something of pique in her voice:

"I hope you have been gratified, Mr. Courtenay."

"Enchanted!" said he, drily. "And you, have you left off music?"

"For the present," said Florence, languidly; "I am tired of it."

"And London does not agree with you?" said Courtenay.

"So Mrs. Reynolds thinks," replied Florence.

"Something does not, for you are looking far from well," he remarked.

"You were always complimentary," retorted Florence.

"I suppose you never get tired of compliments," said Courtenay.

"Certainly not in your company!" said Florence.

Courtenay took a seat beside her.

"And you are not in mourning?" he said.

"Mourning—for whom?"

"For Le Grange."

"I think you have sat a little too long after dinner, Mr. Courtenay," retorted Florence. "*I* had no reason to regret the loss of Captain Le Grange."

"True; and if you put on mourning for all your admirers it would come expensive," said Courtenay. "It is surprising how differently people view these little accidents; some with indifference, and some with satisfaction."

"I go no farther than indifference," said Florence; "I can't pretend to regret the death of so odious a person!"

"No; but there's a friend of mine who I know will be delighted at the news. I sent him a paper directly, and told him to feel as Christian as he could about it; but I know his only regret will be that he didn't shoot the fellow himself."

"Indeed! Who may that be?"

"Young Warrenne."

"Is it possible? Was he acquainted with Captain Le Grange?"

"He never saw him, I believe."

"And why did he hate the man, then?"

"He thought that Le Grange had not behaved with proper respect to a young lady of his acquaintance."

Florence started and coloured; was it possible that Leonard had thought of her in the matter? It was not likely he could have

known that Captain Le Grange had ever aspired to her hand; so recovering her voice and complexion, she said carelessly:

"What young lady, I wonder?"

"Nay, that's too much, Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, rising; "I can't betray confidence."

"Where is Ada?" said Florence, who did not like to see Courtenay moving off.

"At Weymouth."

"And when does she come back to town? I'm moped to death!"

"Not till May. I hope you may last so long."

"I think it very doubtful," replied Florence. "These people will be the end of me."

"Don't you like the orange-coloured judge?" asked Courtenay; "he is a single man."

"Gracious me! I hope not!" exclaimed Florence; for the orange-coloured judge had taken her to dinner two or three times, and she feared that it might be a preliminary to making himself particularly agreeable.

"Have you forgotten how to say 'No'?" asked Courtenay, laughing at her look of dismay.

"Oh! of course not," said Florence; "only I always fancied people of that sort were married."

"I have heard some women declare that it was so difficult to refuse a man," said Courtenay, laughing.

"Sometimes," said Florence, thinking of her father's last admonitions as she spoke.

"Under what circumstances?" asked Courtenay.

"I shall not tell you," returned Florence, smiling; "I shall leave you to find out."

"I trust that the lady to whom I next declare myself may experience great difficulty in saying 'No,'" said Courtenay.

"And I trust she may say it the very first word!" replied Florence, playfully.

"*Nous verrons*," said Courtenay, bowing, as he backed from the sofa.

The visitors were taking leave—Mrs. Reynolds waited until the door closed upon the last, and then exclaimed, her whole face beaming with animation:

"I like him excessively! I quite dote upon him. My dear Florence, I don't wonder at you! Did you hear what he said of my dear children?"

Florence turned to her mother-in-law with a bewildered air.

"Mrs. Reynolds, you are rather premature," said Mr. Reynolds, looking however with much complacency at his pretty wife; "but I believe we are all of one opinion with respect to Mr. Courtenay. He is a young man whose principles and conduct are so excellent that I confess it would be beyond my hopes if he were to turn his thoughts to—to any one in the present company."

As there was only one person in the company to whom he could with any show of propriety direct his thoughts, Florence blushed, but said coldly, "that, as far as she was concerned, she did not join in the flattering opinions just pronounced of Mr. Courtenay; that she imagined him to entertain very undue notions of his own importance, and to be, moreover, one of the most unamiable persons she had ever seen."

"Oh, Florence! Florence!" said Mrs. Reynolds, archly.

"Your manner to that gentleman this evening did not pass unnoticed," said Mr. Reynolds, sternly; "and you will permit me to observe that your acquaintance with him is not yet sufficiently intimate to admit of your forming an opinion upon his qualities—which, I am glad to know, you have much undervalued."

"I hope he'll call to-morrow, with all my heart!" said Mrs. Reynolds, holding out her hand for her candlestick.

Florence was following, when a look from her father arrested her.

"I do not mean to defend pride as a sentiment," he said, "but if any one may be excused for a feeling of self-esteem, it is Mr. Courtenay. Some persons are proud of their ancient birth, and some of having been the founders of their own fortunes; but he has both these causes for self-esteem, since his descent is high, and he has restored the fortunes of his house by his own industry. I confess it would be beyond my most sanguine wishes if——good night, my dear."

With this unusually kind farewell Florence was suffered to retire—a little disturbed at the view her father seemed to entertain of Mr. Courtenay's merits; but consoled when she reflected that of all women in the world she was the least likely to receive an offer of his good gifts.

"He will marry some excessively worthy creature, of course," thought Florence, as Louise was undressing her, "very ugly, as those good people invariably are; but he won't mind that—I never saw a person so careless about beauty; and in my life I never met any one so unmanageable, so perversely self-willed. Marry! I would rather marry poor Captain Le Grange of the two—I should never have a moment's peace as the wife of Mr. Courtenay!"

"I am quite disappointed," said Mrs. Reynolds, when her husband came in to luncheon, "to find that charming Mr. Courtenay has not been to call this morning—I know it is too early as yet, but I thought as I mentioned the children, he would have dropped in while they were sitting for their pictures, he would have helped to amuse them, little darlings!"

Florence raised her eyes from her plate and looked hard at Mrs. Reynolds, to see whether she was in earnest in supposing that Mr. Courtenay would unbend the calm frigidity of his manners for the diversion of her children, who were now eating their cold chicken and mashed potatoes at the luncheon table; but she said nothing, and as

soon as she had finished her jelly, she left her father and his wife to discuss their plans together.

Mrs. Reynolds soon joined her in the drawing-room.

"We are absolutely alone to-day, my dear Florence—a family party at dinner. A little rest is good for us both, my love, for you do begin to look fagged, and I am a perfect object!"

"I have no objection to dining alone," said Florence, who found a space left for her in the conversation, where she was expected to say something.

"You see, my love," pursued Mrs. Reynolds, "that London not agreeing with us, and my health not being now so strong as I hope, please God, it will be, I have been talking to Dr. B—— a good deal before luncheon, and he says that we can't do better than go to Baden for the summer, and then straight on to Italy when the weather grows a little chilly."

A flash of joy lit up the face of Florence. To Italy! away from all these tedious people—out of reach of Mr. Courtenay whom her father was bent on adoring, and the orange-coloured judge, who began to be so very civil,—to Italy, where she might perhaps meet with Leonard, whose image became dearer to her every day, as she contrasted it with the people with whom she was doomed to associate. Oh! why could they not go to Italy at once, instead of lingering at a German Spa, when if they delayed, Leonard would be in all probability set forward on his more distant travels?

"And Mr. Reynolds," pursued Mrs. Reynolds, little guessing how fast her hearer's thoughts were voyaging—"Mr. Reynolds, with his usual kindness, subscribes entirely to the wishes of Dr. B——: and only suggests that as I am but delicate, we should leave the two darlings with Mrs. Creswick during our absence. And here is Mr. Courtenay, I do declare, whom I had absolutely given up!"

"Given up at four o'clock?" said Mr. Courtenay, coming leisurely into the room. "What are your hours?"

"I was thinking of the children," said Mrs. Reynolds; "shall I ring for them?"

"I came to see *Mr.* Reynolds this morning," said Courtenay; "they showed me into the wrong room."

"*Mr.* Reynolds?" asked Mrs. Reynolds.

"A little matter of business," returned Courtenay.

Mrs. Reynolds rang the bell.

"Shall we see you again?" she asked, as the servant appeared to conduct Mr. Courtenay to Mr. Reynolds' study.

"I don't know—if I can," replied Courtenay bowing to both ladies.

"How you can like that man, Mrs. Reynolds, is a mystery to me," observed Florence, taking up her embroidery.

"Ah, ah!" said Mrs. Reynolds, nodding her head.

"I'm serious," returned Florence.

"Are you really?" said Mrs. Reynolds. "Such a very fine young man; so dignified, and so very well off. I can't believe you, Florence—I really cannot!"

Florence made a contemptuous gesture, and applied herself to her work.

In about half an hour Mr. Reynolds came in, took up his station on the hearth-rug, and looked benignantly at his wife and daughter.

He was supremely pleased at something, that was evident; but he seemed to pause a little for words.

"I confess myself deeply gratified by Mr. Courtenay's visit to-day," he said at length: "gratified, and touched by the very flattering terms in which he solicited an alliance with my family. You have been selected, Florence, by no common person."

"I!" exclaimed Florence, turning as white as her handkerchief.

"Oh! Florence, Florence! after all you said!" cried Mrs. Reynolds.

"It is beyond my hopes," said Mr. Reynolds, looking even more tall and grim than usual; "principle, birth, fortune! I see nothing left to wish for. I need not say that my unqualified consent was warmly given. It strikes me as something remarkable that Mr. Courtenay, endowed with so many advantages, should desire a connection with my family. He might have looked higher in every sense, and I trust that, as from circumstances which I am about to mention, the marriage cannot take place till next year, you will employ the intervening time in diligently improving your mind and character."

One ray of hope seemed to sustain Florence beneath this intelligence. She might meet Leonard Warrenne in Italy. Nothing could be more vague than her chance of meeting him; for she might be at Pisa, while he was at Naples; and if they met, she might not be able to summon back the feelings which he had once professed for her; but she hoped, she did not stay to reason.

"You share my feelings, Mrs. Reynolds, I am sure," pursued her husband; "you rejoice at this unexpected piece of good fortune. Courtenay dines here to-day."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Reynolds. "Dear Florence, I congratulate you."

"It's rather sudden, isn't it?" she said, passing her hand over her eyes.

"What am I to understand by that remark?" asked Mr. Reynolds, with an expression of great surprise in his countenance.

Florence trembled.

"We go abroad in a fortnight," pursued Mr. Reynolds; "and Courtenay informs me with regret that it is out of his power to accompany us. As the marriage could not take place in that time, I am compelled to defer the event until our return."

"Thank Heaven!" thought Florence.

"When Courtenay returns to dinner," added Mr. Reynolds, "I

have only to inform him of your acquiescence in the proposal he has done you the honour to make. I told him as much before, but not having then apprised you of the fact, it will require that confirmation. Need I say," he added, offering his hand to his daughter, "that I congratulate you, and I trust you may deserve your good fortune."

The party then dispersed to dress. Florence, alternately hot and cold, was oppressed in turn by fear and indignation. With one slight reservation she had no hope left: she knew her father by this time. And to be won unsought! To be supposed to be grateful for the condescending offer of Mr. Courtenay! She almost longed to see him once again, that she might try to guess by his manner what he could be dreaming about. She was soon gratified in this particular.

Mr. Courtenay entered, as they were all sitting round the fire before dinner, with his usual self-possession, shook hands with the whole party, and then, taking a seat on the sofa beside Mrs. Reynolds, caught up one of the children on his knee, and made room for the other among the sofa cushions, to the great delight of their mother.

It was not until the evening, when the children were gone to bed, and Mrs. Reynolds was making tea, that Mr. Courtenay crossed over to Florence, and drawing his chair quietly close to hers, said, with the most perfect composure:

"I learn from your father, Miss Reynolds, that you have done me the honour to receive favourably the proposals which I made to him this morning."

What would Florence have given to be able to tell him all she thought of him and his proposals; but although her father was quite on the other side of the room, she felt as if his eyes were upon her, and she merely bowed her head.

"Allow me to express to you the sense I entertain of your goodness," said Mr. Courtenay, without in the slightest degree taking the trouble to appear as if he meant it; "and my regret that you leave England so shortly after an arrangement that gives me such entire satisfaction."

"Heaven send," thought Florence, "that I may be beyond your power before I return!"

However, as it was almost necessary for her to make some remark in return for so much civility, she forced herself to say, as he rose to reach her tea-cup:

"We go abroad in a fortnight."

"Do you like travelling?" he asked.

"I have hardly tried," said Florence; "we were so very quiet, you know, at Erlsmede."

"What a delightful spot it is; I should like to live there, should not you?"

"No, not much," said Florence, giving back her cup, and sinking into the corner of the sofa.

"I wish that I could spare the time to join you at Rome," said Mr. Courtenay. "You will be absent all the winter, I think?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Florence.

"And how do you mean to amuse yourself?"

Florence sighed. Then she began to turn over in her mind how it would be possible to learn from Courtenay what his friend Leonard's plans were; it was difficult to put the question, because she felt so conscious. Two or three times she was about to make a beginning, and as often she stopped, fearful lest her manner should betray her interest.

At last, Courtenay, who had sat silent for some time playing with the long silken tassel of a hand-screen that lay on the cushions, looked up suddenly, and said:

"Young Warrenne is in Sicily, or you might have happened to meet; one stumbles so oddly upon one's acquaintance in travelling."

The colour flew to her face and then faded away, leaving her so deadly pale, that Mrs. Reynolds, who was passing the sofa, stooped to the ear of her step-daughter, and whispered:

"My dear, has he been asking you to name the day?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. WARRENNE CONSENTS.

For several weeks after Captain Scudamore's unsuccessful interview with Mr. Warrenne, Maud was afraid that Alice was going to make good her declaration, and die, for she drooped more and more every day. But there was no wilfulness mingled with her weakness. Her sensibilities were concentrated by her blindness; and therefore she was slower than another in recovering from the shock they had received. And something of the pride that still lingered, very improperly, in the Warrenne family, made her strain every nerve to conceal her sufferings. The idea that any one could think she was dying of love, filled her with dismay, and she returned feebly to her family occupations, as if in the hope that their monotony might fill up the blank that Captain Scudamore's absence had made in her life.

Perhaps, after the principals, Mrs. Thorne took this disastrous turn of events more to heart than any one else. She several times offered valiantly to accompany the young people to India, if Mr. Warrenne could thereby be induced to trust Alice to Dick's protection. She stipulated, indeed, for Jack Robins, because she was sure that she never could endure to be waited upon by the natives. This proposal not exactly meeting the views of the people concerned, she was now and then tempted to call Alice a "little humbug," and to insinuate that she was not deceived by persons who set up for being blinder than their neighbours; in testimony whereof she adduced one Jane

Cowper, of whom she had heard, though no one else had, that she feigned for some years to be totally deaf and dumb. But in the main, she was very sorry for Alice, and thought her father very hard upon her; for, as she remarked, "Not one man in fifty would have taken a fancy to a blind girl, if she *was* blind; and now the poor thing gets an offer, she is not allowed to accept it!"

As for Mr. Scudamore, he always held the idea on every subject as long as he could, that "things would come right at last;" and so, though he felt that he could not controvert one of Mr. Warrenne's opinions and arguments on the affair, he saw his son set off for London to make arrangements for his return to India, with the vague presentiment that when he did set sail, it would be in company with Alice.

It was a melancholy time for Maud. Her sister's wretchedness was too apparent. It would be better for them all when Dick was fairly gone; there might be some hope then of his being forgotten.

One morning Mr. Scudamore came into the garden by way of the green gate as usual, and finding Maud at work among the rose trees, made his way towards her.

"How's the child?" he asked, as soon as he came within speaking distance.

This was his regular question now. Maud knit her brow a little.

"Much as usual, grandfather; she has gone to take a little walk with papa."

"Gone out walking, is she? When will she be back?"

"I don't know," returned Maud, rather abruptly.

She went on gathering her dead roses. Mr. Scudamore paced backwards and forwards, making several sounds of impatience.

"How you do fidget, grandfather!" said Maud, at last.

"I have got something I want to tell the child," said Mr. Scudamore, at last.

This was too much for Maud. Down went her basket and scissors. She stepped into the middle of the path, just before Mr. Scudamore, with flashing eyes.

"I tell you what, grandfather, this won't do!" she exclaimed; "if Dick chooses to prefer Alice, it's very well; I've no objection: but if *you* begin to like her better than me—I'll—I'll—I'll not forgive you!"

A hearty peal of laughter was all the reply Mr. Scudamore could make at first to this attack.

"Very pretty, indeed, Mistress Maud," he said, as soon as he could speak. "I shall grow vain in my old age!"

"Tell me your news directly, then!" she said.

"Why, so I would, you vixen," he replied; "only it happened to concern Alice more than you, and was more likely to interest her."

"What is it—this moment?" urged Maud.

"Why, then, Queen Maud," replied Mr. Scudamore, "Dick, who you know went up to town about his passage, *won't go*."

She made something like an effort to echo his last words, and stood breathless.

"Not a foot!" continued Mr. Scudamore. "He won't go! While Alice lives, he says he won't leave England, and I'm glad of it; he retires on his pension, he will stay with me at the Woodlands, we shall manage very well together. Eh, he loves the child, you see, too well to give her up. I think it is the best thing he could do, for my part!"

Maud was in tears.

"What do you say, Queen Maud? What do you think?" said Mr. Scudamore, as he led her slowly up and down the walk.

"Oh! grandfather, I am so happy!"

"Your father can't refuse her now," said Mr. Scudamore. "She will almost be under his own roof! What is it to the Woodlands? Not half-a-mile, I do believe!"

It was a remarkably long half-mile; but the precise distance did not signify.

"So, you see, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore, "I was right in saying my news concerned Alice more than you!"

"Not a bit more," retorted Maud. "Always tell me everything first, grandfather!"

"And here they come!" said Mr. Scudamore: "and here are Dick's letters. We shall see now whether Mr. Warrenne will withhold his consent!"

Mr. Warrenne's consent was duly forwarded by return of post; and so ended the romantic half of Alice's attachment.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FIT OF DEPRESSION.

Florence was perfectly right in her estimate of Mr. Courtenay's character when she said that it was impossible to find any one more perversely self-willed. But, however little flattered she was by his selection of herself, perhaps she would have been still less so, had she known that it arose entirely from that very perverseness she so much dreaded. Unable to succeed in gaining the regard of the only woman who had really touched his heart, he was very careful to go into the opposite extreme, and to choose one for whom it was impossible that he could feel any affection at all. He was far too wise to place his fate in the hands of the capricious Florence, and he had, therefore, without trying to learn her sentiments on his behalf, secured at once the powerful intervention of her father.

He had now to communicate his success to the Thomasons, who had returned from their tour, rather unexpectedly, a few days after his engagement. He breakfasted with them as usual, the morning after

their return, and while the ladies were giving him a detailed account of their excursions, Mr. Thomason seemed occupied in glancing over his letters and papers. He looked through two or three business-looking documents, and then breaking the seal of a more aristocratic missive, scanned it hastily, and then said to his daughter :

"Another offer, Ada. I am really ashamed of always having to give the same answer. Do try to be more lenient."

"*Les beaux yeux de ma cassette*," said Ada, reaching out her hand, not for the letter, but for a plate of fancy bread on the table.

"And what am I to say, my dear?"

"As usual," replied Ada, hardly attending to the question, and turning to ask her cousin for the butter.

"I think, my dear, you might, as he says, give him the opportunity of seeing more of you," remarked Mrs. Thomason, who was, in her turn, reading the letter : "it is hard upon the poor man not to have the chance of making himself acceptable."

"Never take a man upon trial, my dear mamma," said Ada ; "they always fancy themselves so furiously ill-used when you turn them off again ; don't they, Charles?"

"How should I know?" returned her cousin. "Haven't I told you that I should be sure to go about these things differently from other people?"

"And who is the man, after all?" asked Ada, holding out her hand, at last, for the letter, and glancing down at the signature. "J. Sterling? I hardly know him by sight! I don't think I meet him anywhere scarcely. I had rather hoped it had been Mr. Roxby : to *souffler* him from Mrs. Liversege would have been rather a triumph. That is the reason I let him dance with me so often on the Wednesday before we left town! Did you observe us, Charles?—for he dances so very badly—quite out of time, you know!"

"Ah! you are all alike, you women," said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "Almost all," he added, after a moment's pause.

"Almost! of course, there is some bright exception," said Ada, pouring herself a cup of coffee ; "a particular star, who has none of the foibles of her sex, and remarkably fine eyes into the bargain."

"Certainly," he replied, quietly ; "you are perfectly correct in your supposition."

"I have thought Charles in love, lately," said Mrs. Thomason, with a sigh.

"Perhaps you were never more mistaken in your life!" said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "I am going to be married, and that is quite enough at one time : no need, I am sure, to be in love also!"

"You, Charles!" cried Ada.

"Myself," he returned, with his usual coolness.

"Well, then, I'm very glad to hear you say so, at last!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason ; "and I've often wondered why you hadn't married over and over again ; so much sought as you are in society, and so

earnestly as your poor, dear father has begged and prayed of you to do so; and after your poor, dear brother's sad fate, I am sure nobody in the world could blame him for being a little anxious to see you happily married and settled! and when a young man has enough and to spare, as you have, if you liked to marry ten wives, there could not be the slightest objection! You could afford it, thank Heaven! And all I hope is, Charles, that we shall have no long engagements, but that everything will be put in hand as soon as possible, and then poor, dear Mr. Courtenay will be made happy at last!"

After this incoherent address, Mrs. Thomason wiped her eyes, and took a muffin upon her plate.

"I entirely agree with you, Mrs. Thomason," said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "If I intended to establish myself at Pera, the ten wives would be perfectly *selon les règles*. It is quite impossible to have too much of a good thing; but, as my views are moderate, I relinquish my claim upon the other nine. I also believe that *poor, dear Mr. Courtenay* is the only person who will be very much delighted with the present arrangement, unless it is the lady's father; but we must recollect that there are marriages which please nobody. Mine will have the advantage of contenting the lookers-on. And with regard to long engagements, though I cordially echo your sentiments, and am in a great hurry myself, yet, unhappily, the match cannot come off till next year."

"And who is the lady, Charles?" asked Ada, impatiently.

"Miss Reynolds," returned Courtenay, handing his cup to his cousin. "I don't see why you should keep all the good things to yourself this morning. You may give me some more coffee?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason; "why, I never thought you liked her! Surely, Charles—well, it's very odd—I suppose I made a mistake."

"I hardly believe he's in earnest," said Ada, looking perplexed.

"It is a very suitable match, and I congratulate you with all my heart," said Mr. Thomason. "Mr. Reynolds is a man of large fortune, his daughter cannot fail to have something handsome."

"Yes; and I want money so much," said Mr. Courtenay, who had received all the remarks on his approaching happiness with exactly the same imperturbable expression of countenance.

"Well, now, I always thought Charles would have married somebody without a shilling," said Ada. "I can't in the least make out his reasons for this match!"

"Can't you? Your mamma has given you a whole string of them—enough even for a woman—and in such variety!"

"I don't know. I can't fancy you attached to her," said Ada; "and somehow I don't particularly wish to have Miss Reynolds for a cousin-in-law."

"That is a sufficient plea, I am sure, for breaking off the affair," said Mr. Courtenay, in a quiet tone.

"Good gracious, my dear Ada, don't let us hear a word against it!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason, in a great bustle; "here, after all this delay and vexation, Charles has fixed upon somebody at last, and let us keep him to it, if we can. Poor, dear Mr. Courtenay! I only wish we were down in Devonshire now to witness his joy. It must be a great delight to see your only child married. Of course, Charles, you have had time to write to your father and receive his answer? Ada, we call the very first thing on the bride-elect, remember."

"I rather wanted Charles to go with me to the National Gallery this morning," said Ada.

"Nonsense, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason. "You must not expect your cousin to be at your beck and call now that he is going to be married; you must find somebody in your turn."

"I'll escort you with all my heart," said Mr. Courtenay quickly; "why shouldn't we go?"

"Indeed, I won't hear of it!" cried Mrs. Thomason.

"It would be a great want of respect to Miss Reynolds to be flourishing about with another young lady, even though she is your cousin. I often think," she added, with a deep sigh, "that the world is coming to an end."

"I'm sure we won't hasten the catastrophe," said Mr. Courtenay, taking up his hat. "But never mind, Ada, we will defer our visit to the Gallery for a few days, and then the coast will be clear, for Miss Reynolds will be out of England."

So the Thomasons went to leave their cards upon Miss Reynolds, for she was out driving with her step-mother, and then returned to see their own company.

"It is a wonder to me," said Ada, seated near the bow-window in the inner drawing-room, with a book half-closed in her lap, "how anybody can go about making calls such a delicious day as this. If I had my own way, mamma, I should be in Richmond Park, lunching under the trees."

The remark could not be called personal, for there was nobody then in the room but Sir Frederic Manning, who often dropped in of a morning, and went wandering about the room, without taking much notice of anybody.

"Ah! my dear," sighed Mrs. Thomason, "when you know the world a little better, you will learn the claims that society has on your time. People can't spend their lives in Richmond Park!"

Ada did not reply. The muslin curtains swung to and fro in the breeze, and the branches of the creepers, which were trained against the windows, floated backwards and forwards.

At last Sir Frederic came in front of Ada's chair, and standing still, with his arms folded, looked down upon her attentively.

"Clever fellow, that cousin of yours," he said.

"Charles? Oh, very!" replied Ada.

"If he chose that attitude, he ought to have been a sculptor," said Sir Frederic, pointing to the statue of Ruth.

"He had something to do with it," returned Ada. "He made W—— alter the left arm, which was a little raised; the hand is now on the ground."

"I see; very good—very right," said Sir Frederic; "that left hand and arm I think equal to anything in modern sculpture."

"Do you?" returned Ada, carelessly. "I'm tired of it now. I liked it very much at first—the statue altogether, I mean."

"It only shows now what prejudices govern society," said Sir Frederic; "here is this statue, which I admire solely as a work of art, entirely as a beautiful piece of sculpture, and yet if I were to ask permission to have a copy made of it, I should be looked upon as a madman—it would be a thing unheard of."

Mrs. Thomason had gone out of the room for some fresh worsteds —Ada had to answer the question herself.

"Because," she said, speaking with some effort, "though to you it is merely a good statue, other people would recollect it was the portrait of an individual."

"That's the point," said Sir Frederic. "'Other people' often stand in the way of our wishes—and it is singular that we should defer so much to the opinions of those who, though they have the power to make us uncomfortable, have neither the power nor the will to make us happy!"

"I am sure," said Ada, trying to laugh, "that were it not for those same 'other people,' papa would gladly oblige you in this particular. He is not fond enough of works of art to be stingy of them."

"Well," said Sir Frederic, looking round and perceiving that Mrs. Thomason had disappeared, "I start for Rome to-morrow morning, oblige me by making my adieux to Mrs. Thomason."

Ada could hardly echo the words "for Rome," before he had made his departing bow, and his step was heard rapidly descending the stairs.

He had succeeded in convincing her of his perfect indifference, at any rate. It almost seemed as if his visit had no other aim. She tried to reason with herself for a little while, and then, stooping her head upon her hands, she gave way to a perfect shower of tears.

"Eh! What's the matter now?" said the voice of her cousin, after she had employed a few minutes in this manner.

"Nothing; don't bore me, Charles! I'm only depressed," said Ada, raising her head.

"Only depressed," repeated her cousin; "you are surrounded by luxury and indulgence, you have health and youth, your parents idolize you, and because you are troubled with a passing headache, or put out in some trifling scheme of amusement, you give way to tears, and talk of being *depressed!* But this is the way with women! I

thank Heaven there is no woman living whose tears could influence *me*. I know what they are worth."

Ada's flowed faster at this exordium. Courtenay stood beside her, looking uneasy.

"Yet, if you have any cause of distress (which you can't have)," he added, drawing a chair quickly beside hers, and seating himself, "you know how gladly I would exert myself in your behalf."

Ada put her hand into his, struggling to subdue her emotion. He sat beside her quietly waiting till she should be able to explain herself.

"You see, Charles——," she began; then, after a pause, she added hastily: "What was the prejudice Sir Frederic had taken against me?"

"Oh, Sir Frederic!" returned Mr. Courtenay, as if entirely enlightened as to the cause of her tears. "I don't in the least know to what you refer."

"At our ball in the winter, it was you who told me!" exclaimed Ada.

Mr. Courtenay remained holding his chin for a moment; then recalling the circumstance, he replied:

"Ah! he said he would never dance with a woman of fortune again, that was it; and so I could not with propriety introduce you to him as a partner."

"That was very absurd!" exclaimed Ada.

"Excessively," returned her cousin.

"He has been here very often, Charles, since then," murmured Ada, breaking afresh into sobs.

"Has he? So much the worse," said Courtenay.

"And now he says he is going to Rome," added Ada, almost inaudibly.

"So much the better," returned her cousin.

"What have you to say against him?" asked Ada, looking up suddenly.

"Everything," said Mr. Courtenay.

"I don't believe a word of it!" cried Ada indignantly.

"Then I need not trouble myself to go into detail," said Mr. Courtenay, with perfect coolness.

"No," replied Ada, starting from her chair, "for I am going directly to papa to beg him to accept Mr. Sterling, if he has not already written."

Ada was in a passion.

"By all means," said her cousin, looking after her as she flew from the room, "since the refusal went three hours ago."

"Where's Ada?" asked Mrs. Thomason, as she entered.

"Gone off in a rage," he replied.

"No!" exclaimed that lady, sinking into her chair.

"Fact," replied Courtenay, walking to the window.

"Charles, I want to speak to you seriously," said Mrs. Thomason.

"Eh?" said he, coming up to her.

"I have been puzzling for a long time about Ada," said Mrs. Thomason; "it is so very odd her refusing every offer that is made her one after the other in this way; now is it not, Charles?"

"Very singular," he replied.

"Do you know, I half fancied that you were the cause of it," pursued Mrs. Thomason, "and it made me very uneasy."

Mr. Courtenay bowed.

"Of course, I mean, Charles, because you are cousins, and because you did not seem to think of Ada; I could have no other objection, you know."

Mr. Courtenay bowed again.

"But I watched her when you announced your engagement—I am sure I have not half congratulated you yet—and I saw that she did not take it in that light."

"Ah!" said he.

"Well now, Charles, tell me candidly what you think of Sir Frederic Manning?"

"My dear aunt, he is one of those inconvenient people who possess a kind heart and a bad head."

"And did not somebody tell us he was in difficulties?" pursued Mrs. Thomason.

"They told you very true," said Mr. Courtenay; "his estate is mortgaged to a terrible extent."

"Then I'll tell you what, Charles," said Mrs. Thomason, with an air of great sagacity, "he will not do for Ada; and I shall take very good care not to be at home when he calls, nor to send him any invitations to our parties—eh?"

"You could not do better, my dear Mrs. Thomason," replied Mr. Courtenay gravely; "and as you are fond of proverbs, I can give you one that is very applicable to the present occasion, 'When the steed is stolen, shut the stable-door.'"

(*To be continued.*)

A SEAFARER'S HOME.

By F. A. Fulcher.

TRULY a seafarer amongst birds is the little whistling pipit of the rocks.

All the year round, come weal or woe, come rain to polish the pebbles and reveal their hidden depths, or drought to dry the sea tangles and blazen the cliff with poppies; come clouds scudding, and waves hurtling, or light vapours floating overhead, while summer ripples croon along the shore; come what will, come what may, the rock-pipit is always at home in his boulder-strewn pebbly domain.

For the rock-pipit has never taken to the wandering ways of the travelling birds, whose fashion it is to spend the winter here and the summer there; to go south with the swallows and invalids, or north to the moors with plovers and sportsmen, or to Scandinavia with the fieldfares, and redwings, and fishermen, hooded-crows, snow-buntings, North-West passage explorers, bramble-finches and the rest of the north-wending travellers.

Here, there, and everywhere, go migrants and tourists nowadays, but the rock-pipit keeps the even tenor of his way, unmoved by the nightingales who rest on his borders in the spring, and sing of tempting swarms of dainty insects they have left on the edge of Sahara sands; or the wheatears, who whisper of corn in Egypt; even the family traditions of his cousin, the tree-pipit, cannot lure him from home.

He keeps open house in the winter, when numberless arctic birds, frozen out of their home in the lands where winter is proverbially inhospitable, come to sojourn with him. The shore-larks, with their fine manners and handsome yellow throats, and the turnstones, who make free with his stores, nearly eat him out of house and home at times. Then, indeed, but only when he has shared his last crust with them, the rock-pipit has to take his guests up the cliff and out to the fields where the meadow birds live, in search of seeds and worms. But he never strays more than a mile from his home on the shore, and soon wearies of the dulness of these inland excursions; it is well-known among the land birds that it is hopeless to try to keep him.

By the end of April, the ogre which held the northern countries fast bound in iron bands has departed, no one knows whither; but the rock-pipit's visitors are free to return; yet they cannot induce the rock-pipit to pay them even a flying visit in return for his hospitality; nothing will persuade him to leave home for a day.

Such a beautiful home! so full of treasure and wonderment; rich with gems from ocean depths; strewn with flowers of the cliffs; gay with the wings of flashing gulls; musical with the songs of the larks

above and the waves below; all the glory of sea and sky is shed here, all the awe of powers beyond our ken rests here. No wonder the bird loves it.

His delicate black legs and long-toed slender feet run nimbly over some of the choicest treasures of the world's museum. Here lie among the common stones many of those handsome choanites which so well repay the collector of natural bric-a-brac by showing marbled depths of fine colour and crystal clearness when polished, and the curious form of the animal encased in this gorgeous sarcophagus. You may scarcely know them among the stones of the beach till you learn the secret of the tiny clear specks that appear on their rough surfaces, and the spot where the cylindrical body of the choanite, which runs through the pebble, shows in a round patch at either end. The rock-pipit dare not have them polished or they would soon all be stolen from him, except now and then when it rains or storm-spray beats high, for then few pass his way, and his treasures are safe. His choicest gems are disguised and hidden in rough cases.

Learn the secret of another of his safes. Some of those round nodules of flint, opaque and valueless to all appearance, are diamond mines. Search till you find one with a tiny hole in its surface, running deep to the centre, break it open, and the chances are ten to one it contains a glittering mass of crystals gathered in the beautiful form of the branching sponge, which first collected them to itself, and which has long since disappeared. Some of these nodules contain crystals of pure white, some of pink, others of brown, and grey, and yellow; very lovely are all of them.

The old shepherds on the downs above, where also many are found, call them "noodles," and I have been told by them that they are the swedes and turnips which the Romans planted hereabouts, petrified and crystallised; but the rock-pipit doubtless has studied that complex system of old time sponges and knows better, or he would not collect them.

Fossils too, innumerable, are buried in the rocks here; often the walls of the crevice in which the little green bird makes its round and bulky nest of coarse grass is studded with the remains of the dwellers in some ocean long since dried up or run away. The finely-shaped nautilus, beautifully formed ammonites of many kinds, sea-urchins traced over with delicate geometrical patterns, shells and fish of many varied kinds lie buried in the great mausoleums of the rocks. They too, though, lie hidden, and only betray their presence where one small portion is exposed on some storm-rent or water-worn surface. But this is quite sufficient to guide the seeker to them; the rest can be unearthed with chisel and hammer, and care. Wondrously beautiful in symmetry of form are some of these creatures of bygone ages; their like is almost solely now existent among the creatures of very deep sea soundings, the last remnants of types and races which are slowly dying out in the darkness of fathomless ocean bottoms.

In what lies the fascination of the past that its relics attract us so irresistibly? A tiny shell half hidden by chalk or mud come down to us from a thousand thousand years away; a piece of old rag from the poor mummy of nobody knows who; a chip of brick from an old wall; a scrap of old vellum penned by some unknown hand: these, of no beauty, of no intrinsic value, have nevertheless grown sacred by the flight of years, and we value them and ponder over them and make our speculations, possibly very far from the truth, with as much favour as though they were some exquisite specimen of Etruscan art or the rolls which hold the story of a nation.

But I doubt much if this has struck the rock-pipit. He takes life as it comes, and the treasures that lie lavish around him he questions not.

There are beautiful living things in this home of his too. No need for the rock-pipit to pick flowers and bring hither to decorate his pasture as those curious birds the bower-builders do. The spring lays out his garden for him, and while the bower-bird's flowers die as fast as he plants them, the rock-pipit's pleasaunce is gay all through the summer.

Over the pebbles purple tassels of sea-pea trail their green leaves after them. There is an old legend that this small plant arrived miraculously in some time of famine to afford food for a starving people; but, if this be so, its little size and bitter taste must cruelly have mocked them. Close to it grows sea silene, short of stalk and single flowered, with grey-green leaves and the swelled seed-cup with purple veinings. The yellow-horned poppy comes up golden crowned, like a king among flowers, wherever wind-blown dust has clung to the rock. Tufts of pink thrift and bosses of saxifrage, sprays of wild rose, blue harebells, white lychnis and wall-flower blown from some distant garden, or brought by the birds, come up on these patches of soil. Wild mignonette, waving tamarisk, bachelor's buttons, and sea-holly, with its fine, blue flowers and handsome leaves, all these grow up the cliff under the sunny skies that shine blue in the heavens above and bluer still in the seas below where the rock-pipit dwells.

There are sea flowers on the beach, thrown up by every tide even in summer; but in winter there come such masses on storm-driven waves, that great banks of seaweed lie along the shore. Sometimes the poor come to glean this harvest, and throw it on the land to enrich it; sometimes they dig pits, and burn it to make kelp; sometimes it is theirs to keep or to sell; sometimes they earn good wages in harvesting it for an employer. In either case it is in two senses a windfall, and adds many an extra gain to their regular earnings.

Some of the seaweeds thrown up on his estate are of the most delicate colours—pink, and mauve, and scarlet—but the greater masses are of a uniform brownish-green, and these it is that must have taught the rock-pipit what to wear. For it is the fashion among all pipits to adopt a mimetic style of dress. The tawny pipit of arid

deserts in the East wears a sandy, yellow suit; the tree-pipit of our woods is clad in a sober brown, just the hue of the boughs in which he perches; the meadow-pipit is scarcely noticeable in the ploughed lands and fallow fields which he loves; the pipit of the rocks wears olive-green so like the colour of the seaweeds that gather slimy and slippery over their surface, that he may defy even the keen glance of a hawk or a falcon on all ordinary occasions, though sometimes we must admit the fates are against him; and in such case not even mimetic colouring will save bird or beast.

Many charming birds visit this seafarer's home. Flocks of gulls sail in, circling and wheeling in mazy figures, now over sea, now over shore, now floating lightly on the waters, now settling like flakes of sea-foam on the low-lying rocks of low tide; stormy petrels come in from their life on the ocean wave to hide their nests deep down in the shingle; guillemots fly heavily down the cliff to dive for small fish that glitter as they rise again with their prey. Maybe the oyster-catchers and ringed plovers from some neighbouring beach of sand, or a mud-flat not far away, come when the tide is low; and land birds from above—wheatears, and stonechats, and sometimes a rare Dartford warbler—visit the rock-pipit by the sea. Peep, peep! cheep, cheep! Always the same answer he gives to the various cries that greet him; and I think it means, "Here I am, and here I mean to stay," for even to us—and we frighten him a little as we wander through his home—he says this. Peep, peep! cheep, cheep! sounds from crag and boulder a little ahead, as he flits before us in short, wavering flights, and gives us plainly to understand who is lord of the manor in this Seafarer's Home.

AMONGST THE MISSING.

A GLARE of light; a brilliance of handsome ball-dresses and varied uniforms; the warm scent of exotics and the seductive sound of dance music. It was the Duchess of Richmond's famous ball on the eve of Quatre Bras. Thought of coming battle disturbed the gaiety of the scene not a whit. Women sought to forget anxiety for husband or lover in the excitement of the dance; soldiers, the responsibilities of war; and diplomatists, the gravity of the approaching crisis.

"By Jove!" said a heavily-moustached cavalry captain, standing gazing critically at the dancers, with a group of brother officers. "Who's that very pretty girl dancing with Carrington of the Scots Greys?"

"What, the fair girl in pale blue and white?" said a supercilious young aide-de-camp. "That's Alice Maitland, daughter of Sir Robert Maitland. Carrington's in luck; he's been dancing with her nearly all the evening."

"Yes, they say he's hopelessly in love with her," said a cornet of Carrington's regiment; "can think of nothing else."

"Poor fellow!" rejoined the supercilious one in a tone of fine contempt, pulling the somewhat scanty hair that adorned his upper lip. "And I suppose he'll commit the inexcusable fault of matrimony, and there'll be the end of him."

"Yes, if she'll have him; they say Ashby's entered for the same stakes though, and running strong, but Carrington certainly has the start of him."

"Well, I'd lay my money on the Major, now," broke in a fourth speaker. "Ashby's a deuced bad rival to run against."

"Take care," said the cornet; "they passed quite close to us then; I shouldn't wonder if Carrington had the full benefit of that interesting remark of yours."

Soon the dance and the interval that succeeded it were alike over, and the subject of the above conversation made his way towards a little knot of officers of his own regiment who were talking in low tones just inside the porch that led into the street, evidently engrossed in discussing some unusually exciting intelligence that had just been imparted to them. Carrington was not long in learning its import. In fact, their colonel had just received the famous order which has rendered that gay evening so memorable. The enemy's advance-guard had been discovered within a short march of Brussels, and the Duke had at once issued instructions that the officers should slip away from the ball without attracting attention, and be ready to march in three hours, with the prospect of immediate action. How strange the irony of fate that necessitated such an order at such a moment!

Carrington received the intelligence without comment. For the moment the great news almost staggered him. He passed hurriedly through the porch and into the cool night air, and there, pacing nervously to and fro, tried to realise what it meant to him. Captain Arthur Carrington was no coward, and indeed had served with no little distinction in the later Peninsular campaigns, and to such good purpose that he had won his captaincy after an unusually short term of service. No, a year ago it would have been glorious news to him, but now his enthusiasm was tempered with a strange sense of regret. Since then he had fallen in love—desperately in love—with that lovely girl with whom he had just been dancing, and during the last few days, despite the momentous events looming in the immediate future, and threatening at any moment to engulf him, he had been lost as in a pleasant dream, peopled only by himself and the fair Alice Maitland.

Now he must needs wake up to the hard realities of a soldier's career. Before another night had fallen he might have lost Alice for ever, with the life she had made all too sweet for him. As he paced up and down, thoughts crowded hurriedly through his brain. Then came an intense longing to tell her his love and learn his fate from her lips. If only he knew that she loved him, then it seemed he could go out readily enough to to-morrow's battle—the to-morrow that had almost begun—and meet death, if it came to him, with the courage worthy of an English gentleman.

Yes, if only he knew! For somehow the thought that he might never know was torture to his mind. And yet was it not the merest selfishness on his part to ask a girl to pledge her life to him and confess her love, when that love might after all mean little else but mourning and sorrow—the terrible sorrow of one who knows but a few short hours' betrothal, and then sees the happiness of all the future shattered in an instant? Yes, it was selfishness, he told himself again and again. And yet, a moment afterwards, he found himself pleading that, if she really loved him, her grief would be none the less poignant because she had no right to mourn for him as a lover, and must stifle the cruel pain and keep it hidden in her heart.

So the pros and cons chased each other through his excited mind, till he suddenly awoke to the fact that the music of a well-known quadrille had been sounding half unconsciously in his ears for he hardly knew how long.

He looked hastily at his programme. His partner was Alice Maitland, and the dance half over! He hurried back into the ball-room, and finding her deep in conversation with Major Ashby, he claimed his right with an awkward apology for not having presented himself sooner, and led her away on his arm.

As it was too late to join in the quadrille, they directed their steps to a quiet balcony, that proved unoccupied now that the dance was in progress.

Now it so happened that Alice was not a little piqued at this unwonted want of attention on the part of her cavalier, who up to the present time had paid her nothing but the most absolute devotion ; nor was her somewhat natural irritation decreased by the evident confusion and awkwardness of his manner. Arthur, on the other hand, was quite oblivious of his offence, and as he showed no inclination for further apology, nor indeed for further conversation of any kind, it devolved upon his partner to break the silence.

"Well," said Alice, half playfully and half in earnest, as she settled herself comfortably—and, to Arthur's partial eye, most bewitchingly—in the cushions of a sofa, "well, Sir Truant, have you nothing more to say for yourself in explanation of your gross neglect?"

But Sir Truant's mind was so occupied with a graver question that he had little explanation to offer.

"I am afraid not," he answered rather lamely ; "I was in the porch, trying to get cool."

"Then you must certainly have heard the music quite plainly, and you might have kept your engagement promptly enough—if you had cared to, of course."

The words were spoken with a coldness that showed Miss Maitland was getting really offended ; but strange to say, Arthur neither noticed the tone in which they were spoken, nor realised their meaning, so absorbed was he in the question that was to him so momentous : "Is it fair to her—is it fair?"

The words kept singing in his ears, his pulse beat fast with suppressed excitement, yet he could not solve the terrible doubt that had arisen in his mind. Half unconsciously he answered in a slow deliberate voice, "Yes, of course."

Then the sudden glance that shot from those deep blue eyes—and it robbed them of none of their beauty—and the unwonted severity of the lovely face before him almost roused him from his lethargy. He made a desperate effort to make conversation, and talked hurriedly and nervously, hardly aware of the chilling answers she made to his continued platitudes. In truth, Alice did not stop to analyse her own feelings, nor even to consider what could have made her cavalier so unlike himself this evening. That he should have left her, whom all the young officers raved about, and who might have had a dozen partners by the lifting of her little finger—that he should have left her sitting out, and steadily refusing all applicants until the dance was nearly over, had wounded her vanity and hurt her feelings very considerably. She had expected, at any rate, the most abject penitence to follow, or at least some explanation of his neglect, and was prepared eventually to extend her royal forgiveness to the culprit and reinstate him in her favour.

But this calm indifference with which he regarded his offence, this apparent assumption that he could treat her as he liked, stung her sensitive nature to the quick, and made her for the moment only too

anxious to impress upon him that he had mistaken the position in which he stood to her.

The dance was by this time over, and though the balcony where they were sitting was in a retired corner, there were seats near by and occupied now by the couples who had left the ball-room. To Arthur Carrington their presence afforded an indefinite sensation of relief, and for the moment he felt he was reprieved.

The longing to speak his heart and learn her answer had at last got the better of his scruples; yet he felt almost glad now that he must put off the decisive moment a little longer. And all the time he chattered on thoughtlessly, never heeding that every careless sentence made him appear to her in a less favourable light. Then a waltz tune struck up in the ball-room below; the seats near them were left vacant, and Alice made a movement as though she would fain be following the others downstairs, but her partner refused to notice it. The time had come at last and he was determined to speak, yet hardly knew how to begin.

"Will you kindly take me downstairs, Captain Carrington?"

The words drove him to speech at last.

"Miss Maitland, you *must* stay one moment"—the words sounded to Alice very like a command—"I have something I want particularly to say to you to-night."

"Then, Captain Carrington, I think you might have said it before; now I am afraid it must keep till to-morrow," she answered coldly.

"But, Miss Maitland——"

"Will you kindly take me downstairs, Captain Carrington?" she interrupted before he could speak another word. "I am engaged for this dance to Major Ashby, and I would not miss it for the world."

This time the intention of her tone could not escape him. It seemed to burst upon him in a flash that Major Ashby had been very attentive to Miss Maitland lately, and now he remembered hearing that evening some words he had hardly understood at the time. In his excited state he caught up the idea only too readily. She had been leading him on, perhaps, only for her amusement, and all the time Ashby—the very suspicion made the blood leap fiercely to his cheek, and the idea carried conviction all the more speedily that, in the pleasant dream of the past few days, such a notion had never once occurred to him. Oh, how blind he had been! and angry words rushed to his lips that in a calmer mood he would never have uttered.

"Major Ashby's dancing is doubtless infinitely preferable to my conversation, but——"

"Perhaps, even than the entertaining conversation with which you have just been honouring me," she retorted quickly; "but that is hardly the point, I think."

"Only spare me one moment, Miss Maitland; only hear me; and then dance with him the rest of the evening, if you will," he continued bitterly.

They were both standing now: Alice, pale with anger; Arthur Carrington, with a wild look in his eye, and speaking in a voice trembling with a desperate eagerness. "But you don't understand; it may be the last chance; hear what I have to say now, or you may never have the opportunity again."

The words conveyed to her only one meaning, and roused all the pride in her not too humble nature.

"In that case, Captain Carrington, let it be never." She spoke the words clearly and decisively, and, drawn proudly up to her full height, cast upon him one glance of scorn and defiance that spoke to him only more eloquently than her words. Yet he would leave himself no possible ground for doubt; he seized her hand, almost crushing it in his fierce eagerness.

"Miss Maitland, do you quite understand me? For the last time —do you mean that?"

"Certainly," she answered in a tone of icy indifference; and at that moment they became aware that Major Ashby had advanced close upon them.

"This is my dance with you, I think, Miss Maitland," he remarked suavely.

"It is, Major—I hope you haven't been waiting for me long." Then turning a last glance on Arthur, and with a scornful "Thank you, Captain Carrington," she swept away on the Major's arm.

For a moment or two Arthur stood as one stunned, with a dazed look in his eyes; then he turned on his heel and moved slowly downstairs. As he passed the door of the ball-room, he glanced in, and at that moment Major Ashby and his partner passed close by him in the graceful movement of the dance. The Major's head was bent over hers, his cheek almost touching her hair, and the words that he spoke in a low tone in her ear must have been of pleasant import, to judge by the charming smile that they evoked.

Arthur Carrington turned away, his face very pale, with a hard, drawn look about the mouth, and went out into the night to seek his quarters and prepare for the work that was now so close before him.

Meanwhile the gallant Major was rapidly improving his position with Miss Maitland. She was certainly very pleasantly disposed to him this evening, and received his little advances with a readiness which, to tell the truth, the Major had never noticed in her before. For Major Ashby, although he enjoyed, and was not a little proud of, the reputation of being a master in the noble art of lady-killing, did not let his conceit ruin his judgment, and could usually guess very shrewdly his true position in a lady's affection. I do not wish to insinuate that the Major was a systematic heart-breaker; but though his affection for the sex collectively was unlimited, his particular affection for any one member of it had hitherto proved strictly limited in point of duration. In other words, like many another, he was devoted to flirtation, and, what is more, was really skilled

in that intricate science. The latest object of his affections was, needless to say, Miss Maitland, whom, though he had an acquaintance of some standing with her father, he had never met until a week ago. Since then he had prosecuted his suit with more earnestness than usual, spurred on not a little by the evident rivalry of Arthur Carrington. This evening a considerable weight had been lifted from his mind by the little scene above related, of which he had quite unintentionally witnessed the close. He had seen sufficient to make him tolerably certain, by putting two and two together, that Arthur Carrington had proposed and been definitely refused. Hence he was not altogether unprepared to find himself in sole possession of the field.

Yes, there was no doubt about it, Miss Maitland was bent on making herself extremely agreeable. The Major felt that he was making more advance in that short half hour than he had during the full week he had known her; nor had the charm of her manner ever struck him so forcibly before. At length, all too soon, the music stopped, and he and his partner retired to the same balcony where he had found her before the dance. They stood in the cool night air, looking out across the dusky landscape that lay dimly revealed by the bright starlight.

"Major Ashby," she asked suddenly, "why is it you men are all leaving so early to-night? I saw a dozen officers or more preparing to go as we were on our way upstairs."

"Do you know, Miss Maitland, that is a secret I'm afraid I hardly ought to tell—even to you," he answered quietly, his voice lingering softly on those last words.

"A secret?" she queried. "Oh, then you must tell me! I shall never forgive you if you rouse my curiosity in that way, and refuse to satisfy it."

"Well, I am afraid I can refuse you nothing," he said, with a smile, after a moment's pause. In truth, he was wondering what impression the news might make upon her. "The fact is, we have orders to leave the ball quietly and be ready to march in two hours. The enemy's advance-guard is reported to have crossed the Sambre, and we shall be in action before the day is half over."

If he had hoped for some sign of distress on her part, he was amply repaid. As she realised the full meaning of those cruelly straightforward words, all the colour fled from her cheeks. He thought she would have fainted, and put his arm round her to support her to a chair.

"I am so sorry for startling you like this," he said penitently; "but I never thought you would have any—any particular interest in the news."

"Oh no," she said, with an attempt to smile, "only it was so sudden; it quite took my breath away!"

For a moment neither of them spoke.

"Alice—Miss Maitland," at last he continued in an earnest voice —so earnest that it almost surprised him—"Miss Maitland, you don't know what a terrible thing it is for a man to go into battle when his heart is sunk in despair; when he has no hope of the one thing that could make life worth living. If only I thought—if only you—if you only——" he stammered, and almost for the first time in his life felt completely at a loss.

Her face was very pale, and her eyes, unnaturally bright they seemed, were looking into his with an expression he could not fathom. She seemed hardly to understand him, and yet to follow every syllable with an almost painful interest; but she answered not a word.

Then another couple came and sat close behind them, and he had no further chance, or perhaps desire, to express his meaning more clearly. He felt he had gone rather further than he had intended; and yet he only half regretted it.

* * * * *

Two hours later the regiment was quietly falling-in in the open street along which most of them were quartered. Not many minutes later all was in readiness, and they were moving quietly out of the town on the road to "honour and glory," a road along which many a man of them, his heart now beating high with hope, would never return.

As they left the outskirts of Brussels the Major found himself riding close to Arthur Carrington, and attempted, with singularly little success, to draw him into conversation.

"Well, my boy," he said at last, "I can't say you're in an entertaining mood to-night, and you look as solemn and glum as a Sphinx —I give you up;" and the Major, who was in surprisingly good spirits, relapsed into unwilling silence.

"Ashby," suddenly said Arthur, speaking in low earnest tones, "will you answer me one question? It may sound an impertinence, but if you knew what it means to me, and perhaps you can guess, I think you would not refuse me."

"Dear me, we are very mysterious to-night! What may it be?" quoth the Major, evidently in an excellent humour with himself and the rest of the world.

"Do you—care for Alice Maitland?"

"Why, of course," returned Ashby, with a smile; "don't we all love her madly?"

"Yes, but have you more serious intentions?"

The Major for a moment seemed in doubt as to whether he should answer the question; then he replied quietly: "Perhaps I have."

Carrington looked searchingly into his face: "You really mean that?"

"Certainly." And the answer seemed to satisfy his questioner, for he remained silent.

Presently he spoke again, in a low voice and rather huskily, so that the Major could scarcely catch the words:

"I suppose *she* cares for *you?*"

"I haven't asked her."

"But you can make a pretty shrewd guess."

"Well, she was terribly cut up when she heard I was going straight into action to-day, if that means anything;" and the Major spoke in the complacent tone of one who thought it meant a great deal. Then, as if ashamed of having revealed so much, he continued sharply: "But that's enough, my friend. This is hardly a subject for discussion."

"Quite true," said Arthur drily. "Yes," he muttered to himself, "the rich man and the ewe lamb; it's an old story now, but none the less sad for all that. Thank God," and the grim thought brought a bitter smile to his lips—"Thank God, there'll be big fighting these next few days, and a man doesn't often come through big fighting if he doesn't care to."

Yet, alas for the inconsistency of woman, or perchance the stupidity of man—at this very moment, not half a mile away, Alice Maitland was sobbing herself to sleep, and the name the poor girl murmured so fondly to herself was not a name to which Major Ashby could lay any claim.

No need to dwell upon the agony of those terrible days of suspense, only to be followed by a yet more terrible certainty, when, after news of the glorious battle of Waterloo, came the list of killed and missing, which embittered the sweetness of victory and shattered the happiness of so many English homes.

Included in that fatal list was the name of Arthur Carrington, Captain, Scots Greys, and what that simple line of print meant to the girl, who, loving him so truly and fondly, had yet sent him away in hopeless despair, with words she would now have given all the world to unsay, we may also leave untold; nor pry into the heart that must needs hide its cruel pain behind the mask of cold indifference.

* * * * *

The flag was flying over Maitland Court, which proclaimed to the surrounding country that the Maitland family was at home. Usually they had a large house party in the summer, but Sir John had had a bad attack of the gout, and so there were few visitors. Amongst these was Major Ashby, now seriously in love with Alice Maitland. Judging from his success on the night of the ball, when, as he thought, she had been within an ace of accepting him, he had anticipated a welcome reception to further advances, but to his surprise and disappointment he found her cold and reserved when he reminded her of their conversation on the balcony. She was so listless and unlike her usual self that he could not but notice the change. To be precipitate and receive a refusal would have been fatal. The cautious Major wished to make sure of his ground, and by dint of skilful remarks and close observation, he succeeded in guessing the real truth of the matter;

and indeed, when he so far forgot himself as to tax her with a love for Carrington, she made no attempt to deny it. The knowledge that Carrington, and Carrington alone, had had any chance of winning her hand was something of a shock to his vanity; but he pretended to a vast deal of sympathy for her unhappy attachment, and, in consequence, Alice Maitland and he were before long on very intimate terms; and the Major reflected that he was making excellent progress and had but to bide his time.

This being the state of affairs, it was not with feelings of unmixed pleasure that one morning at breakfast he received a letter from a brother officer and read the following passage:—

"And now of all people in the world—or, to write more correctly, of all people believed to be out of the world—whom do you suppose I saw yesterday? None other than Arthur Carrington. You may imagine how astounded I was when the poor fellow report had killed and buried some months ago greeted me with a hearty shake of the hand, which testified conclusively to my doubting senses that he was no ghost but veritable flesh and blood. He seems to have had a very narrow escape, and looks a bit thin and pale, with a slight gash over his eye from a French sabre; he fell when first we charged, lay for dead in the enemy's lines, and had a horrible night of it. Strange to say, he never lost consciousness, though he was ridden over by the Prussian cavalry and very roughly treated by would-be looters. At last, by means of promising a heavy reward, he prevailed on a peasant who searched him for coin, and was grievously disappointed at finding his amiable designs had already been forestalled, to carry him to his cottage, where he lay at death's door for six or seven weeks; but the peasant and his wife, apparently a very decent couple when their avarice could side with their humanity, managed to pull him through with the help of a local apothecary, and Carrington left for Brussels with the blessings of the worthy couple. Then he made his way to England and London, reported himself at headquarters and came across me at the club."

Major Ashby read this wholly unexpected news, and instinctively glanced at Miss Maitland.

"Why, my dear Ashby," said old Sir Robert, "you look terribly grave—no bad news, I hope, eh?"

"Oh no, thank you, Sir Robert—quite the contrary. Yet," thought he to himself, "it might turn out very bad news for me," and again he looked at Miss Maitland.

Breakfast over, Major Ashby lit a cigar and strolled by himself on the terrace.

"This dead man turning up like a bad penny is exceedingly awkward," he thought, "and may play the deuce with my prospects of marrying Alice Maitland. There is no doubt that she was very fond of him; she's been dreadfully cut up about his death, and just as I was making way in her good graces, it's uncommonly hard that those

wretched peasants should have saved him and let him come back to England to spoil sport." And the Major puffed vigorously at his cigar and walked up and down the terrace as he meditated on the best course to pursue in view of the return of his rival.

Alice did not yet know but that her lover was really killed (and under six feet of earth in the plain of Waterloo), but that she would long remain in ignorance of the real state of affairs was most unlikely. At all events, he would not be the bearer of the news; of that he was determined. All's fair in love and war, and as the cigar burnt lower he came to the conclusion that the only plan for him was to waste no time, but propose for her hand that very day and trust to a successful issue.

Evidently fortune favoured him, for just as he had made up his mind to risk all on an immediate proposal at the very first opportunity, the fair cause of his heart-burnings stepped out of the French window on to the terrace, basket in hand, armed with thick gloves and a pair of scissors, as pretty a flower-seeker as one could well wish to see. Here was his opportunity all unsought.

"Fully equipped for an expedition among the flowers, I see," said the Major, flinging away the stump of his cigar.

"Yes," she said, "among the wild flowers this morning."

"And may I be my lady's escort?" said he.

"You may," she laughed; "and, like a faithful knight, you shall carry the basket."

There had been a heavy fall of dew in the night and every blade of grass glistened in the sunshine. A mist overhung the horizon and gave promise of a hot day, and the lazy drone of the bees, the languid caw of the rooks, and the distant voices of reapers in a neighbouring field came softly through the air. As the Major walked across the lawn toward the meadow beyond, and talked to the pretty girl at his side, he felt as if Nature smiled upon his love, and the sweet hope of possession came over him, while the serpent which lurked in his paradise, in the shape of the unwelcome letter, was carefully hidden away in the breast-pocket of his coat.

Now it happened on this same lovely morning that Arthur Carrington was travelling from London to his home in Gloucestershire, not far from Maitland Court. The beauty of the scenery had no pleasing influence upon him, for, as he drove along the well-known road, he thought of his blighted love, and a hundred times he cursed the Frenchman who had done his work so ill, and left him life to remember the bitterness of his disappointed passion. Then he would upbraid himself for his ingratitude to the Providence which had preserved him, and vow to think no more of the girl who had rejected him, but face his future like a man, exchange into an Indian regiment, and never see Alice Maitland again.

But when the post-chaise drew up at the Maitland Arms, and the postillion got down to water the horses and refresh himself with a

copious draught of ale, Carrington felt a great desire to go and see the house where he had first met his fate, and the garden where he had walked with her in the old days, seemingly so long ago, before he went abroad, and before that unlucky night at the Brussels ball. Perhaps, unseen himself, he might even catch a glimpse of his beloved —see her for the last time. Prudence told him it was a fool's errand, but Prudence spoke unheeded.

Leaving word that he would return in half-an-hour, he took a path which led through meadow-land and corn-field in the direction of Maitland Court. Just as he was nearing the highway which divided the fields from the park, his heart beat quickly, for he heard well-known voices, and had just time to stand in the shelter of the hedge, when Alice Maitland and Major Ashby, in earnest conversation, came down the road and leant against the dividing style. They were so intent in conversation that they did not notice him, where he stood, not daring to move. To see her thus, with his successful rival, was galling indeed; Carrington set his teeth, and hoped they would pass on down the road. He scarcely heard what they were saying, so dazed was he with the unwelcome sight, but he heard her speak his name, and held his breath, and could but listen.

"Yes," said the Major, speaking very earnestly, "you loved him; but that is past; and now that he is dead, it is all different. Surely you will not sacrifice the living for the dead?"

"Do you think," she said, speaking very slowly, and with evident effort, "that—that there is no chance that he is—is not dead? He was only reported amongst—the missing."

It seemed so hard to speak out her impossible, but fondly-cherished hope, only to be shattered by the sceptical common-sense of another. For a moment the Major hesitated. It was one thing to conceal the news of a rival's safety, another to deliberately state that he believed him to be dead. She looked up at him with such an eager look in her eyes, that the Major, feeling how little she cared for him in comparison with her love for Carrington, fiercely resolved she should be his at all cost, and flung all scruple to the wind.

"It is useless to deceive you with false hopes," he said. "There can be no possible doubt but that Arthur Carrington was killed—if not we should have had news of him by now."

Carrington could contain himself no longer; every pulse in his body seemed to be throbbing with the exquisite thought that she loved him.

"Not so dead as you think, Ashby," he exclaimed, stepping into the open from out the shadow of the hedge.

Alice gave a little cry—all joy, all wonderment; and would have fallen, but that Arthur caught her in his arms.

"I am delighted to have been mistaken," retorted Ashby bravely; but, needless to say, the gallant Major did not look it.

THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc., etc.

INSENSIBLY as the needle points to the Pole, so the gaze of all who visit Cairo is directed towards the Pyramids.

It is possible to see them in the distance from the heights of the Citadel, forming part of that wonderful view already described. Beyond the windings of the sacred Nile rise the well-known outlines, centre of interest in this matchless panorama. If you wander away into the outskirts of the desert, still afar off you may see those tombs rising in solitary grandeur. Only when you have scoured many miles of this waste land, and placed many brown and yellow sandhills and undulations between you and the Pyramids, do they finally disappear from view.

And then you have turned your back upon the world, and stand face to face with Nature; and night and day succeed each other, and suns rise and set, and nothing meets the eye but a wide wilderness; unbounded plains of white glistening sand on which the sun pours his hot relentless rays, or the moon sheds down her soft and silvery light.

Here indeed is the majesty of an almost eternal silence: a solitude to all intents and purposes never broken; the rest David longed for when he wished for the wings of a dove—but of which he would soon have grown weary. Only a despondent mood could long bear with the sameness and desolation of the desert, and David's was no morbid mind. He felt keenly for the moment, and his self-reproaches were profound and bitter whilst they lasted; but once over, his thoughts recovered their tone and his songs were no longer set in a minor key.

So one day we also turned our faces towards the Pyramids, and our backs upon Cairo.

Passing out by the road leading to Old Cairo, we soon branched off from it over the great iron bridge which spans the Nile, to the credit of the French who built it. To the right lay the magnificent park and palace of Gezêreh, but we had nothing to do with that to-day, for our road lay sharply to the left.

So to the left we turned. Osman was not our companion. Important and unexpected official news had caused him to remain with the Khedive, and very reluctantly we had to bid each other a temporary farewell.

"I hoped we should have seen the Pyramids together," he remarked; "but so long as I take part in the diplomatic world, I am not master of my own time. On such occasions I almost regret not having withdrawn from it all ere now; but one likes to live with some object in view, and do some little good in one's day and generation. After all, you will not find in these mighty Pyramids the subtle charm and beauty that delight one in the Tombs of the Caliphs and the Mosques of Cairo. They will awe you by their size, their simple majesty of outline; but the refinement of minute detail is absent from them. Ascend them by all means, but do not attempt the interior. It is an ordeal, with very little to repay you."

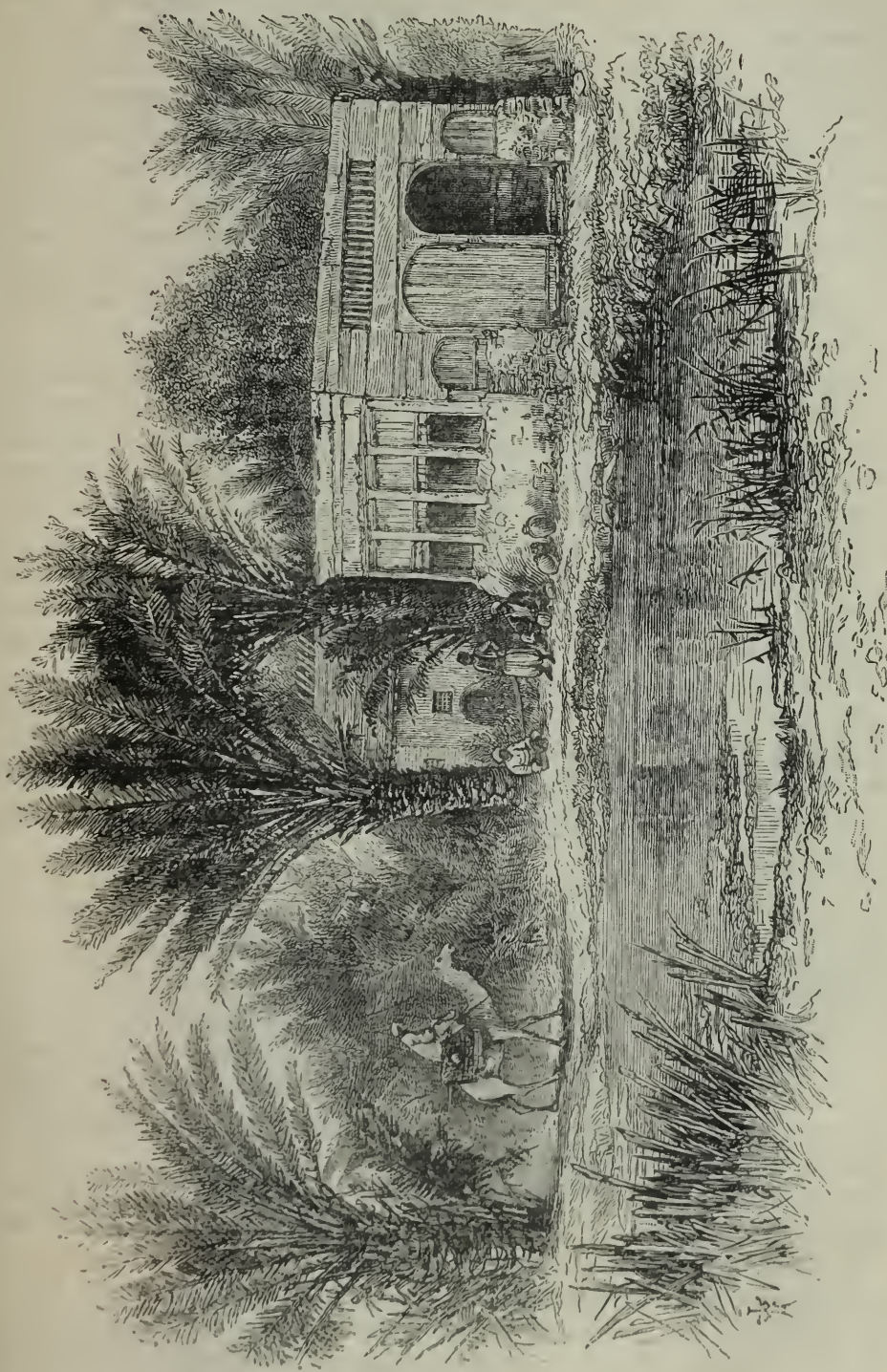
So we departed, yet not alone. General A.—our fellow-traveller from Marseilles, with whom we had formed a pleasant acquaintance—joined us. To him also it was all old and familiar ground, and our visits together to the Boulak Museum had been especially interesting. He revelled in its antiquities as much as we delighted in the Tombs and Mosques of Cairo: and had them all by heart.

The drive occupies about an hour and a half, and the new road stretching from Cairo to the very foot of the Pyramids, makes it an easy journey.

It has, however, taken away much of the romance of the situation. By this new road the Pyramids seem almost in touch with the capital, linked with civilisation. The possibility of adventure, the charm of the picturesque, have almost disappeared. Side by side with the venerable waters of the Nile this macadamised road runs straight as engineering skill could make it. Beautiful trees overshadow it, but they are not the picturesque date-palm or the noble sycamore: for the sycamore of Egypt rivals the stately oak of England.

In past times a journey to the Pyramids from Cairo was a very different matter from a visit of to-day. The present road is built upon a broad embankment, high and dry above all inundations. At the time of the rising of the waters, these escape and spread into the surrounding country through two bridges, and the traveller passing over them, may keep on his way dryshod. Not so in days gone by. Then, at the overflowing, the canals intersecting the wide plains were lost in broad sheets of water, laden with fertilising influence but unpleasant to encounter. It was a journey accomplished

more often with the help of donkeys or camels than in any other way. The road was necessarily circuitous and eccentric; possessing some-



EGYPTIAN WELLS.

thing of the charm of an old-fashioned house, where unexpected passages and staircases meet you at every turn.

The whole panorama, to right and left, was essentially Egyptian. Behind you lay the old capital, with its citadel, as yet uncrowned by the Mosque of Hassan. Beyond rose the Mokattam Hills, just as they rise to-day: for the "strength of the hills" is unchanging. The surrounding plains were covered with forests of date-palms, bearing rich clusters of fruit in their season. The ground, also in its season, was green with waving blades of corn. Villages sprang up in the plains, and mosques and tombs were conspicuous, whilst the tamarisk and acacia led up to them in shady groves. The distant Pyramids were always visible, not only those of Gîzeh, but those of Sakkarah, Aboosir and others. Some of us are accustomed to think of the Pyramids of Gîzeh as the only Pyramids of Egypt; but Egypt is a land of pyramids, and there are many of them. Beyond all lay the desert with its grey sandhills and barren rocks.

In those days herds of camels and buffaloes might be seen plodding their patient way between Cairo and the Pyramids, and so passing away into the desert: features which added so much to all this picturesque Oriental charm. Large flocks of birds, after a rapid flight, would alight on the watery plains, and contemplate their white reflections with serene pleasure. All was intensified by the wonderful rarefied air, and above all reposed the clear blue skies of this land of corn and wine, of milk and honey. Air and sky have no little to do with its charm; they appeal to the imagination and intoxicate the senses: but it is a power in which no evil dwells.

All this has been changed, and people now comfortably bowl to the Pyramids over a smooth road in modern landaus and barouches. The donkeys are still there for those who prefer them; but the buffaloes have become almost a tradition, and the camels are only used as beasts of burden.

The scene, nevertheless, still has much beauty. Behind us yet rises Cairo, with its mosque-crowned citadel backed by the Mokattam hills. Near us flow the waters of the Nile, enlivened here and there by a dahabeeyeh or a barge with sails full set if the slightest breeze is blowing. At best their progress is slow and lingering, and those who travel by them need patience and self-control. The journey up the Nile often seems interminable, and many a traveller having chartered his dahabeeyeh for the second cataract, contents himself with reaching the first, and imagining the remainder.

Boats are moored to the banks, and natives are busy at their various occupations. Some are carrying bundles of sugar-cane, others are looking on in idleness, or perhaps are squatting upon the banks and breaking the cane by bending it round their heads, a process which says much for the hardness of their skulls. On our right we soon pass the Boulak Museum, crowded with its wonderful collection of antiquities.

To-day we did not stay to renew our wonder and admiration. There had been a little delay in starting and time pressed. It was afternoon

PALM TREES.

and the sun was declining: we desired to reach the Pyramids in time to ascend them before sundown. The plains stretched to our right and left, but many of the ancient villages have disappeared. Especially the village of Gîzeh, once said to contain so many palaces and to possess so much wealth and importance, is now little more than a handful of pale grey ruins, with no sign of greatness left. A few habitable houses may still be seen, a few neglected cafés, a small population engaged in rearing poultry by means of artificial heat—a process not unknown to the ancients: and this is all that remains of Gîzeh. In the days of the Mamelukes it was a favourite summer resort of all the rich people of Cairo, and wealth and luxury reigned within its walls. It was strongly fortified, and with the Island of Roda protected the capital from the advance of the enemy. As recently as a hundred years ago its mosques and other buildings still threw their shadows upon the waters of the Nile, but of these nothing remains excepting a few ruins.

Towards the end of the drive the road began to ascend; the fertile plains gave place to sandy wastes, where cultivation became impossible. The Pyramids stood out more conspicuously. Endless carriages passed to and fro, very much out of harmony with the scene, whilst it was evident that their occupants for the most part had as little reverence for antiquity. The end of our journey was a shock for which we had been more or less prepared, but a shock nevertheless.

We drew up at the steps of a large and fashionable hotel, fitted up with every modern luxury and convenience, including the electric light, all reposing under the very shadow of the venerable Pyramids. This is one's first impression of a spot on which mind and imagination have dwelt from childhood upwards, and at first one feels terribly disillusioned. The sandy space in front of the hotel was more or less crowded with vehicles, many of them waiting to be hired: just as they might wait in the streets of Paris or London. At the further end, towards the Pyramids, a small crowd of Bedouins, controlled by a Sheykh or Patriarch—a venerable-looking being with a dark, handsome face and a white beard—were restlessly moving to and fro, on the alert for fresh arrivals: victims to be pushed and hoisted to the summit of the Great Pyramid with undue haste and ignoble ceremony.

As our driver gracefully stopped at the hotel, down came a fashionable *Portier* to receive us. We at once gave up the struggle to imagine ourselves in the regions of profound antiquity, and followed our guide into richly-carpeted halls, endless corridors and a perfect labyrinth of bedrooms.

There was very little time to dwell on these things before consigning ourselves to the tender mercies of the Bedouins, told off by the Sheykh as our escort.

On first approaching the Pyramids a sense of disappointment is

inevitable. For years imagination has magnified them into monuments almost piercing the skies. One expects to be more overwhelmed than when gazing upon the highest mountains of Switzerland or a towering chain of the Himalayas. At the first moment we wonder why so much should have been made of these structures, which scarcely excite our surprise. But it is a feeling that very soon begins to wear away, and presently disappears. The more we see of the Pyramids, the more we marvel, the greater their influence upon us. Standing at their base and looking upwards, we become more and more impressed and lost in astonishment. Only very gradually does their size make itself truly felt and realized: and never, perhaps, from the very nature of their construction, is it quite understood.

To-day all we could see and gather was a wonderful structure, of which the enormous stones were piled one upon the other; and which —we felt with a sort of despair—had to be climbed. Three Bedouins were assigned to us, three to H. General A., to whom the ascent was nothing new, decided to enjoy the sunset from *terra firma*.

It can scarcely be said that we climbed up the Great Pyramid. The advance guard of two men dragged us up by the arms, which once or twice just escaped dislocation. The office of the third Bedouin was to act as a sort of propeller, and assist the advance guard by vigorously pushing up from behind. At this undignified proceeding, however, we drew the line, and dispensed with his services; a concession for which he showed far less gratitude than it deserved. The stones were enormous, and often beyond anything less than the stride of a giant. Fortunately the advance guard kept a good hold upon us, and the arms refused to leave their sockets; otherwise, instead of seeing the sun set from the top of the Great Pyramid, we should have been comfortably reposing in unconscious fragments at the bottom.

A breathless ascent of fourteen minutes, and we reached the top, feeling that our last moments were approaching. But we had exaggerated the evil, judging of the probable result by our sensations. A minute's rest restored us to a normal condition, and we were able to look around.

We stood on a platform of about twelve square yards. After the rapid ascent, the small footholds of stone after stone, it seemed a huge space, on which one felt a sense of freedom and security. Quite a small crowd could have been accommodated here without danger. Happily we had it to ourselves, and the magnificent view and sunset were disturbed only by some half-dozen Bedouins who seem to haunt the platform, and pressed us to buy worthless "antiquities." We had to yield for the sake of peace and quietness and the sunset.

Originally this platform was far smaller, and the pyramid has been lowered by thirty feet. This was done centuries ago, when the stones were removed to help in the building of Cairo. It is almost as puzzling to conceive how they were brought down, as how, in

remote ages, they were taken up. The secret will never be known; but we do know that the ancients possessed powers and possibilities and secrets, of which we cannot even dream: a tenacity of purpose, a greatness of conception and idea, a physical energy, altogether out of proportion with man's seventy years: which pass "as a dream that is told."

We turned to the view. Nothing could exaggerate its charm and magnificence, its apparently boundless extent. There are two distinct views and impressions to be gained from the top of the Great Pyramid, according to the season of the year: what time the waters are out upon the earth, and the vast surrounding plains look as though another deluge were coming upon them; and again when the waters have long disappeared, and a green and fertile country on the one hand, stands out in strange contrast with the sandy wastes of the desert on the other.

So was it to-day.

It was not the time of the inundations, and we could trace far and near the winding waters of the Nile, which ran a serpent-like course between rich plains, studded here and there with small villages; those of Gîzeh, Fostat, and Boulak especially visible. From this point, all the picturesque craft moving upon the water, or moored to the banks, looked like small dream vessels. The sun was nearing the horizon; all the glare of day had disappeared; the sky was putting on a deeper tone; the air was almost intoxicating. Afar off the domes and minarets of Cairo, the citadel crowned by the Mosque of Hassan, were distinctly outlined against the clear sky. The rarefied atmosphere seemed to diminish half the distance. Everything—domes, minarets, citadel—was touched and gilded by the setting sun; or rather was flushed to a rosy red. The Mokattam hills behind the citadel were also steeped in this glorious light, which, as the sun descended, turned to a rich, delicious purple, the true Eastern bloom. Amongst these Mokattam hills are the quarries of Masarah, which, thousands of years ago, furnished many of the stones with which the pyramids were built. Cairo also, in this fading light, looked like a dream city.

The contrast in the scene spread at our feet was wonderful and marked. On the one hand cultivated plains, full of repose, in time ripening to harvest: emblem of life. On the other hand the sandy desert, stretching away into infinitude, white and warm under the setting sun, but desolate and barren, incapable of yielding the fruits of the earth: emblem of death. Each divided by a clear and distinct boundary.

Close to us was the second great Pyramid, and far below, looking out upon the boundless wastes of sand, a scene eternal in its unchanging aspect, was the Sphinx.

It was too far down to be seen in detail, but it was impossible, even from here, to look upon it for the first time without a thrill of

SYCAMORES: VALLEY OF THE NILE.

emotion. In a moment we seemed to pass out of the present into touch with the ancients and the far-off past. Here for thousands of years this mysterious image, of whose origin and age nothing is known, has kept a steady outlook upon the distant horizon, the everlasting skies, in eternal silence and solitude. Abdellatif might well observe in the centuries gone by: "Everything fears Time, but Time fears the Pyramids."

Other pyramids were visible from our position. Near the two great Pyramids of Gîzeh, yet separated by a certain distance, are several smaller ones. All these stand upon a plateau of rock about a hundred feet above the level of the plain. Nothing in the shape of monument could be more in harmony with the vast desert. Simple and severe in outline, matching in colour the desert sand, large enough to look gigantic even in this boundless area, a sense of fitness at once takes possession of the mind. They also possess a majesty and repose which equally adapt themselves to the wilderness: a wilderness indeed, in the days when the Pyramids were built. Towns and villages gradually arose: Gîzeh, in the time of the Mamelooks, became lively and frequented; but the immediate neighbourhood of the Pyramids was left to silence and solitude. Only in these days, when nothing is sacred, have the spirit and atmosphere of these ancient tombs been desecrated, and music and dancing, feasting and revelry are found under their very shadow. One day, it may be, the Sphinx will awaken from its long slumber endued with supernatural power, and in righteous anger will cause all the disturbing element to vanish into thin air.

To the south, as we looked from the platform of the Great Pyramid, rose the Pyramids of Aboosîr, Dashoor and Sakharah; the latter, a step Pyramid, with its wonderful interior corridors and Apis tombs. To the north were the Pyramids of Abû Roâsh, with hilly undulating outlines in the background. Beyond all, as we have said, stretched the great desert, in the heart of which Bedouins encamp; where caravanseries wend their weary way across the trackless wastes, guided by compasses by day, by the stars when night falls. There the deceitful mirage has awakened many a hope in the parched traveller, only to quench it again more certainly and hasten in despair his untimely end.

To the east, the scene changed as by magic. All the yellow and brown of death and the desert, turned to the green of vitality, lighted up by precious water that in the wilderness means life to the dying. The river wound its course, its waters this evening, in the sunset, flushed to a warm tint, rich but fleeting. Canals intersected the plains, their courses traced by the beautiful palm-trees that grew upon their banks. Other trees, in groves and clusters, spread out their fan-like branches and overshadowed the Fellah villages that were raised on mounds and embankments above the level of the plain, out of reach of the periodical overflow. Like a silver thread

BEDOUIN ENCAMPMENT.

ran the high road to Cairo, not aggressive here, but reminding one of civilisation and the world and disillusion : a hundred thoughts one would like to banish.

The sun sank, a round red ball, clear to the very end. It touched the horizon, then gradually disappeared. Almost immediately the sky in the east and north became flushed with a deep orange glow, more gorgeous than anything ever seen out of these latitudes. The whole sky seemed to catch the reflection and throw it back to earth, where with the light of day it soon departed. The Mokattam hills took on their lovely purple, and their outlines grew faint and misty. We felt that the short twilight must be given up to descending : bad as the ascent had been, the return journey would be still more unpleasant. Yet it cannot be said that either experience was really objectionable. Danger has been suggested, but of danger there can be little or none. To some the commencement of the going down may be a little appalling. There are no ropes or handrails to guide your steps, such as, we believe, have now been put up the side of the North Cape : a descent infinitely more trying than the descent of the Great Pyramid.

Down we went, jumping from one step to another, closely accompanied by the guides, who would not leave us for an instant. Twilight faded, the surrounding country grew more and more indistinct. One object after another went out, as if Nature had taken up her roll call and dismissed them ; the shadows on the plains cast by the waving palm-trees disappeared ; Cairo itself passed into a recollection ; the silver thread of the Nile grew dark ; and with some relief we found ourselves once more on a level with the world.

Here the Sheykh with his venerable beard and imposing turban came up, hoped we had not been disappointed in our expedition, and that the guides had done their duty. He urged us to make acquaintance with the interior on the morrow ; but remembering Osman's warning, we left the morrow to decide the question.

Darkness had nearly fallen ; all the surrounding country was shut out ; the Bedouins of the Pyramids—they have lost all the nobility and fine character of the true Bedouin of the desert—were leaving to gather in rest fresh strength for other victims on the morrow ; the Pyramids began to loom out in gigantic outlines against the darkening sky ; lights gleamed from every window in the hotel ; laughter and talking streamed from the great central hall ; all the solemn silence and repose of the summit of the Pyramid had departed. There we had passed out of touch with earth ; had almost hovered on the very borders of the unseen ; nothing but Nature surrounded us, very much of it untouched by Time and the hand of man. Down on this lower level we came back to the ordinary concerns of every-day life.

The hall was furnished in true Oriental fashion. Rugs were thrown

upon the marble floor; mushrabeeyeh screens were cunningly disposed in corners and recesses; Oriental *portières*, magnificent and weighty, hung in front of many of the doors; Moorish lamps shed around a subdued and very picturesque light. Small groups were standing in all directions, laughing, talking, excited; in remote and conveniently shaded corners, sundry couples had disposed themselves on soft couches and were devoting the golden moments to the bad habit of flirting. This is as certain to be met with everywhere as sundry well-known advertisements, and if a bird of the air could carry the tale, which would be found the more commonplace? At best it is reversing the order of things. Marriage should contain the true romance, the lofty ideal; instead of which, marriage too often brings the awakening.

Amidst all this luxury and light, all this noise and laughter, all these fashionable costumes of people waiting for the gong to announce dinner, it was difficult, nay, impossible, to picture oneself as dwelling under the very shadow of the eternal Pyramids. If the kings of old could have imagined their tombs so desecrated, the silence and repose of death so broken, would they not have carried their work to the very centre of the great desert? Perhaps it is well that they do not rest in their tomb-chambers, or ghosts might haunt the precincts of the Pyramids to the terror of frail and frivolous humanity.

In the drawing-room were many luxurious couches, the floor was thickly carpeted, all the ordinary English papers lay about the tables; and here, too, Moorish and other lamps were cunningly disposed to great purpose.

But the most startling effect was reserved for the dining-room. A gong sounded, the doors were thrown open, and a stream of light came forth.

We went down a few steps, and found ourselves in an immense chamber, very lofty, very brilliant with electric light. The walls were painted in Egyptian decorations; large Moorish arches here and there broke the monotony of the outlines; the tables, perfectly appointed, glittering with glass and plate, looked everything that was refined and civilised. Never, in any hotel in any country, had we seen a dining-room so effectively arranged; and seldom, taking it all round, any hotel so perfectly organised. We ceased to wonder that there are those who spend a whole winter at the Mena House, for in addition to this wealth of luxury they breathe the dry air of the desert, which is so much purer than that of Cairo.

Night had long fallen when we once more turned our backs upon all this light and luxury, and passed out into what, by comparison, was an Egyptian darkness.

And yet it was very far from being a dark night. The moon, no longer quite at the full, but still far from her third quarter, was shedding down upon the earth the intensely soft and silvery light she bears in the East. We went forth under the guidance of General A.,

to whom it was all familiar ground and sacred. Like ourselves he deplored the incongruous element of the hotel, but also made the best of it. There were compensations; and to the greater part of the assemblage, attractions; for not six people out of all that number went out to gaze upon the Pyramids by moonlight. We profited by their indifference, for we had the scene to ourselves, and were able to dismiss all recollections and effects of crowds and electric lighting, luxuriously-appointed dining-rooms, and subdued and sentimental corners.

We left the hotel and shook off its dust from our feet, which, however, was soon replaced by the sand of the desert. The latter might be very poetical, but was not comfortable. Under the General's escort we were able to dispense with those formidable-looking Bedouins who wander about the sandhills at night in search of work, clad in dark cloaks and closely-fitting turbans, their noiseless footsteps giving them a sense of mystery which strikes upon you with disagreeable sensations. They are gifted with the eyes of hawks, for they see you in the darkness from a considerable distance. Suddenly, on the brow of a sandhill, you perceive one of these mysterious objects spring up and stand out in the moonlight. In a moment he has espied you in the sheltered hollow, and is leaping down to offer his services, his long cloak flying, his staff flourishing. If you did not know him for a wandering Arab, too often harmless but vagabond, you might invest him with the dignity of a simple shepherd watching his flocks by night, after the manner of the shepherds in the early ages of the world.

We passed round to the other side of the Pyramids, where by day or night, happily, all signs of hotel or any other life have disappeared. Here indeed we may gaze upon these wonderful structures and imagine ourselves out of reach of civilisation. Here the Sphinx looks out upon the desert and the far-off horizon, and nothing need trouble its repose but the cry of the night owl or the howling of the distant jackal.

It was an intensely bright and beautiful night. The warmth of the day had given place to a cool delicious freshness, and the stars shone with unrivalled brilliancy; it was the very place and hour for romance. Higher rose the lovely moon.

We stood facing the Sphinx. The sandhills gleamed pure and cold in the pale light. The shadows of the Pyramids were clearly defined, as were their outlines against the night sky. As the moments fled and the hours passed, their true influence fell upon us. No one has really felt and appreciated the great Pyramids until he has seen them by moonlight. Emblem of death, tombs for the dead, night and darkness are essentially their element. Then, indeed, they looked almost superhuman, full of unspeakable solemnity and repose, of majesty and grandeur. Their very simplicity of outline adds to their influence. The eye, arrested by no particular detail, takes in the general effect of the whole stupendous structures. It seemed

Abyssinian Slave—for Cairo.

impossible to intrude upon their eternal silence. Almost they seemed to commune with the stars. Here Moses might have stood when he received the Commandments and veiled his face from the children of

Israel. They were only less worthy of the honour than Mount Pisgah, the work not of man, but of God.

Less striking, more mysterious, was the Sphinx. This at all times is best seen by moonlight, which softens down the destructive work of time, and throws the mutilated features into shadow. It is difficult to realise its enormous size. Behind it are the immense Pyramids; below it is no object of comparison, whilst sandhills more or less surround it. To-night its solemn attitude of repose, its sense of mystery, were perfect. It seemed immovable as the earth, fathomless as the skies; a safe guardian of the great Pyramids; an oracle waiting the course of the ages for utterance: biding its time. The destiny of the world might have hung upon its lips. One could only think with strange awe and admiration of the minds and the hands which had accomplished these wonders in the far-gone ages, with a largeness of soul, a breadth of conception difficult to realise in these days and never to be approached. The world has grown older; wiser perhaps; but its wisdom has been the result of chance and experience and slow development. The greatness of the ancients was spontaneous. Life seemed long, Time endless, nothing daunted them.

Yet the Sphinx was not placed there to guard the Pyramids, for it is supposed to be of still greater antiquity. The Greek Mythology makes the Sphinx feminine, but the ancients who carved it adorned with helmet and beard, signs of royalty, intended it to be masculine. It is singular how veiled is its origin and its past, many of the ancient travellers who describe the Pyramids not even alluding to it. For ages all but its head and body was buried in sand, but this has been cleared away. Its huge and stately paws fifty feet long, full of repose and power, are now visible, with their Greek inscriptions. The body measures 140 feet, and is formed of the natural rock turned into shape by clumsy masonry. The head measures 30 feet from the forehead to the chin, and is 14 feet wide. Pliny in his descriptions mentions its red colour, some portions of which still remain. That its destiny must have served some religious purpose, seems proved by the Temple immediately beneath it. The stone pavement between its paws led towards the Pyramids. Beneath its heart stood a sacrificial altar, and the smoke of the fire ascended into its nostrils. How solemn, those rites in the wilderness, powerfully affecting the minds of the worshippers in the days of its glory.

The outlines of the face have disappeared, and it is impossible to say to what race they belonged. By the Arabs it is called "The Father of Terror," but its attitude, full of calmness and repose, rather suggests benevolence. Some Arabian writers declare it to be a talisman for keeping away the sand from the fields and pastures beyond, and it was supposed to lose its power, when, according to tradition, a fanatic in the 14th century partially destroyed the face. What now remains is as hideous as a face without a nose can be: but suggests that, like many of the Chinese idols, its countenance was smiling and serene.

PYRAMIDS AND SPHINX.

We have said that its destiny was probably religious, for it seems to guard the granite Temple of the Sphinx, as it is called, which Mariette, devoted Egyptologist of ceaseless energy, discovered in 1853.

The Temple lies a little to the south-east of the Sphinx, which overlooks the granite flights leading into the interior. Looking backward, the huge head is ever visible, as if guarding the sacred precincts from the approach of Evil. Here the statue of Khafra, now in the Boulak Museum, was found at the bottom of a well; suggesting that the temple might have been constructed in his reign. If so, it is the only known temple handed down to us from the days of the primæval monarchy.

Nothing can be more simple than the construction, nothing more stupendous than the labour it must have cost. It is entirely built of huge blocks of red granite from Assooan, varied here and there by equally large blocks of alabaster. At the end of the staircase is a long narrow passage, ending in a large open chamber. This is divided into three aisles by square columns: immense blocks of marble reposing one upon another: an arrangement which has been compared to Stonehenge. But Stonehenge is more rugged and barbarous. The Temple of the Sphinx, more perfect in design, suggests a very different people from the mystic Druids. The well in which the statue of Khafra was found is in the second and smaller transept, and is now filled up.

Leading from the greater hall is a mortuary chamber with six niches for mummies: tombs supposed to have been constructed by Khafra for his own family. All, however, is lost in obscurity. Not an inscription has been discovered, not the smallest detail of decoration, to guide the explorer in giving its origin a date. This very fact—the silence and nakedness of its stones—suggests an age anterior to all Egyptian art and influence. They, full of signs and symbolic writing, would surely have left some record of their work behind them. These Egyptians, who worked for posterity, were not likely to leave such a labour without its "sign-manual." All other monuments belonging to ancient Egypt, down to its most remote period, bear their inscriptions; the Temple of the Sphinx is as silent and mysterious as the Sphinx itself, which guards its secret only too well. The oracle is dumb, and will be dumb for ever.

The construction of the Temple points to a period when the science of architecture had scarcely dawned upon the world. Rude and rough as the Temple of Stonehenge, but with more plan and system, its huge blocks of hard, imperishable granite marvellously and beautifully cut. Whatever its age and origin, it was undoubtedly the work of a mighty and powerful people. Some have thought that this was the Temple of Osiris, situated to the south of the Sphinx: others that it was the Temple of the Sphinx itself: for the Sphinx had no secondary cause for existence: it was not in itself a tomb or

SECOND AND THIRD PYRAMID.

a temple or a shrine: but was supposed to represent a solar deity: was one of the forms under which they worshipped Har-em-Khu—"Horus in the dazzling sun."

All this marvellous temple lies below the sand, and was buried for ages in silence and obscurity.

To-night as we went down the dark stairs and passages, and turned into the central hall, the moonlight streamed in with weird and solemn effect, with deep mysterious lights and shadows. We were in a new world. Much of it was buried in profoundest gloom. The dark starlit sky formed our canopy. The passages leading from one aisle to another were impenetrably dark. Where the moonlight fell we traced the enormous blocks of stone, reposing one upon another. Their mere weight had kept them in place for countless ages. As we gazed upon the tomb-recesses, we almost expected mummies to arise and bid us depart from precincts hallowed to themselves. Our voices alone broke the silence, our footsteps alone echoed through these wonderful aisles.

Even as we looked we were suddenly and desperately startled. One of the mummies—which ought to be here and are not—seemed to have come to life in very deed. A faintest footstep was heard, a voice whispered through the silence with awful effect. A form loomed out, mysterious, clad in sable garments, apparently of gigantic height.

For an instant one's heart stood still, from the very effects of the surroundings, the unexpectedness of the intrusion.

It was only a wandering Arab who had scented his prey, and did not even ask permission to guide our steps. With gestures which were evidently meant to be abject apologies, he suddenly kindled a torch and lighted up the interior. He was wise, and whilst we felt impelled to follow him, he used his torch with effect, and expressed himself by dumb motions, but said never a word: a discretion for which we excused him this intrusion upon our thoughts.

To these he gave a fresh current. The aisles with their huge granite blocks one upon another, their gigantic pillars without base or capital or any adornment, were brilliantly illuminated. Lights and shadows fell and flitted in all directions, and altogether extinguished the softer, more mysterious light of the moon. Weird and mysterious was our guide, his dark flashing eyes lighted up by the torch, the closely-fitting turban standing out in contrast with the dark cloak which these Arabs wear so gracefully. Silent as his voice were his footsteps: noiselessly as a ghost he glided about; the least obtrusive guide we had ever met.

Then, when his work was done, without unnecessary pause or repetition, he extinguished his torch, and with a deep Oriental salutation, waited our liberality. Who could have withheld his hand? His very tact and sagacity merited reward. This bestowed, he put the finishing touch to his perfect behaviour by a second

obeisance, and an instant departure, leaving us once more to the solitude of the temple with its moon-cast lights and shadows.

We also soon bade farewell to the solemn precincts, and went up once more to the regions of the Sphinx and the Pyramids. The moon was higher than when we had gone down, the shadows had shortened. There in the solemn night stood the wonderful creations. The Sphinx looked down upon us, nor seemed to rebuke us for intruding upon the precincts of its sacred temple. Wonderful the outlines of the Pyramids beyond, looking in very truth as if Time might fear them. All about us were sandy hills and undulations.

We climbed to the top of one of these hills. Crossing the plain, a black, solitary, receding image, was our late guide, passing on with slow and dignified strides, his long cloak gathered about him, his staff keeping time to his step. In the distance we heard the howling of a jackal: sharp, angry, eager: as if seeking its prey and baffled therein. Far off to the right, visible in the moonlight, we saw a string of camels plodding their way towards Cairo. These probably had come through the desert from some far-off town—Jeddah, it might be, where our mother Eve is said to be buried—and were now in touch with their well-earned rest: patient, plodding beasts of burden, obedient to the will of man and asking only a little kindness in return. Who would not deal tenderly with the dumb animals of creation?

In all the wide plain we saw no other signs of life. It was a hushed and sleeping world: as far as we were concerned, it might almost have been a desert, dead world. The river ran its silent course: the wonderful Nile, with its atmosphere of romance, almost of holiness. The flushed waters of sunset were now turned into pale silver by the moon, where its rays fell athwart them. As we looked at the Pyramids, a longing took possession of us to climb once more to the top and look out upon the world in all its solemn silence and darkness. We were, however, sufficiently sane to restrain our ardour and not attempt the impossible.

But all travellers, in all times, have fallen under the charm and influence of the Pyramids. Their fascination is in proportion to their size and grandeur. For ages their destiny was a contested point. The opinions even of great men were divided: some thought one thing, some another. Only recently has the matter been finally set at rest. These great Pyramids of Egypt, like all the lesser Pyramids, were intended for tombs. This in no way prevented their being constructed on geometrical principles, but rather added to their interest and perfection. Thought had been brought to bear upon them. Such labours could not be lightly undertaken, and are perfect in every detail.

The building of pyramids in Egypt stretches over a period of some 700 years. It commenced, in round numbers, 3000 years before the Christian era, and ended about the year 2300. When the Pharaohs removed their capital from Memphis to Thebes, their ideas changed:

in place of mausoleums above ground, they preferred tombs cut out of the solid rock of the earth.

Nearly all the Pyramids are found between the Delta and the Fayoum. Many are small, many in ruins. Only a few, such as the great Pyramids of Gîzeh, seem built to defy time itself. Even the step Pyramid of Sakharah, with its immense tomb-corridors and chambers, its gigantic Apis sarcophagi, seems wearing away under the influence of the ever-rolling stream. The construction of each Pyramid commenced from the centre or interior, and was gradually carried upwards and outwards. Every monarch on ascending the throne immediately began building his tomb, and was anxious to finish it as soon as possible, lest death should overtake him. Once completed it could be enlarged and built up more and more, according to the length of the reign. This is a reason given for the varying sizes of the monuments.

The Pyramids of Gîzeh take us back to the 4th Dynasty, or Primæval Monarchy: and Khufu, or Cheops, is supposed to have built the Great Pyramid. Herodotus is the first ancient historian whose record has been handed down. Everything he saw he described vividly, but his historical facts were not always correct. It was probably as difficult to arrive at the truth of things in his day as in ours. To Cheops he ascribes every wickedness, a character apparently not deserved. He is said to have oppressed the Egyptians, and certainly made them work. The construction of the causeway for conveying the stones alone took ten years.

The great Pyramid itself is said to have taken 100,000 men twenty years to build. Tradition has it that it cost £200,000, or 1600 talents, to supply the men with raphanus roots, onions and garlic alone: one of the least considerable of the items. According to Pliny, not 100,000 but 360,000 men were employed twenty years in building the Pyramid: and it really seems as if oppression or slavery alone could have produced such gigantic results.

The present height of the great Pyramid is 451 feet: it was originally 481 feet, higher than the highest building in existence, for even the spire of Strasburg Cathedral is only 461 feet. The length of each side is 775 feet: the area of the base was 63,444 square yards: its solid contents about 85,000,000 cubic feet.

As soon as a king died his mausoleum was hastily finished with an outer covering of hard and polished granite: the steps used in construction were thus filled in and the opening leading to the tomb-chamber disappeared for ever from view. Only one or two chambers of the kings of short reign were decorated, and these not elaborately: those of longer reign carefully painted their passages and chambers, covering them profusely with historical and symbolic legends.

Few subjects have received greater thought, investigation and speculation than these Pyramids of Egypt. Probably all that ever can be said or known about them has been stated; no new discovery

CROSSING THE DESERT.

can well give rise to a new theory; the suggestion that they were tombs and tombs only, is sensible and probable, altogether in accordance with the traditions of ancient Egypt, and the character and superstitions handed down to us of the Primæval monarchs of the Memphite dynasties: the earliest known records, excepting the Thinite, which commences with Mena, the first Egyptian king and founder of Ancient Memphis.

But when all is said and done, the great Pyramids of Gîzeh will remain enveloped in a certain amount of mystery.

To them belongs the homage and veneration due to antiquity, to labours and results unparalleled in the world's history, to monuments that as the Arabian physician of Bagdad so aptly remarked, time itself may fear. Even here, as we see, the despoiling hand of man has not been found wanting; the great Pyramid is shorn of its crown; and it is well for the world that only 30 feet have been taken from its height. The pathway to the top is worn by pilgrims—just as the iron toe of St. Peter's statue at Rome is fast disappearing under the kisses of the faithful; otherwise time has spared the wonderful monument; not wearing the stones, but covering them with a tone and atmosphere, beautiful and refined.

To-night, as we gazed, this exquisite old-world tone was invisible. The still ascending moon threw down her soft and silvery light, and touched the Pyramids with her own peculiar magic. It was not at all the magic we had enjoyed with Osman when looking down upon the moonlit Tombs of the Caliphs; matchless monuments, that, compared with the Pyramids, are but of yesterday.

Here the effect was very different. From our sandhill, with sandhills and plains stretching away into spaces "measureless to man," within a stone's-throw of the sleeping waters of the Nile, we seemed, whilst gazing upon the oldest, most gigantic monument of the world, to have left that world far behind us. The death-like silence around seemed as if it could never be broken; not more dumb and portentous the Sphinx at our feet; not more solemn the Pyramids beyond; not more eternal the far-off sky with its travelling constellations.

And looking upwards those same stars appeared to be shedding down a silent benediction upon this little spot of antiquity, where, combined with the vastness of Divine creation, everything that was great and noble in the work and mind of man had been brought to a magnificent and imperishable conclusion.

THE STREGA'S CURSE.

By Lady Margaret Majendie.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was midnight when at last Colomba awoke thoroughly from the strange exhausted condition in which she had lain so long. She opened her eyes, and sat up on the rude bed on which she had been placed.

With the true instinct of the sick nurse, old Lalla was on her feet and by the side of her patient at her first movement.

There was neither curtain nor blind to the small window which was exactly over Colomba's bed, and the moonlight streamed in, a broad sheet of greenish light, showing every wrinkle and line in the old woman's withered face. Colomba rubbed her eyes, at first she fancied that it was still one of the dream-faces, a creation of her own overwrought nerves, that was still with her; but Lalla's voice, which was kindly in tone, although rather muffled and thick from want of teeth, brought her back to reality.

"You are better, my beauty? See! old Lalla has not lost her skill. It was a bad wound—a very ugly wound."

"And all the more ugly that it was the work of my own father," said Cola.

"Poor child! poor child! but all the same, a father has a right to chastise his child. Do you behave ill to him? Come! I am safe as your father confessor. Tell old Lalla all about it."

Colomba lay back on her pillow, old Lalla sat beside her, her weird face close to her, and the moonlight shone over both.

A great wish for confession, for an outpouring of all the burning, passionate feelings that were swelling her heart, came surging up in the girl's breast. At home they were sick of her sorrows; from the Priore she received now less sympathy, more exhortation. Perhaps this old woman might be different. The savage instinct of want of civilisation was strong in her, to blazon out her sorrows and her wrongs, to make the whole world respond to her lamentations.

"Lalla! Lalla!" she cried, "where is my husband? He has forsaken me! Can you not help me? Comfort me!"

"It depends on the sort of comfort you want, my beauty, whether I can help you or not. Do you owe him a bitter grudge, this faithless lover who has deserted you?"

"I am not sure," cried the girl. "I do not know what I want, or what would ease my pain. I will tell you all about it. I was happy,

Lalla—happy as the kid on the mountain-side, as the wild birds skimming through the air; happy because the future of my life had in it something that might come, some great possibilities, some hope more real and full of what I craved than the joys of paradise. Nino once promised me a new world, a world where to live was life."

"Nino!" cried the old woman with all the peasant's savage contempt of deformity. "You could think of Nino! a splendid girl like you, my beauty, think of wedding a *stroppato*."

"I did not know what a man could be like," cried Colomba, "till that day when I was coming down from the hills, riding our tallest mule Biondino. I found them by the roadside. Gian (may Heaven's curse rest on him!) helpless, unable to walk or stand—Livio, my Livio, kneeling by him with the face of a San Michele, the strength of Christofer, the gentleness of the holy Nathanael! And between us we carried the comrade to the inn. Day after day he used to follow me, he would stand by me in the cemetery where I always sat under the great black cross, or follow me up the road to the spots where the goats love best to browse, till his eyes told me at last that he loved me, and my heart went out to his, and I swore to be his bride. Alas! alas! where is he now?"

"Then," said the old woman slowly, "he mocked you with a half-finished ceremony and drove off with his friend. Child, child! do you believe in him still? Then why is he not here?"

"Why? I have thought, I have wondered, I have prayed. Day after day I stand watching the road with the wild hunger in my heart for him to come. I tell myself to-day—yes, to-day, no, to-morrow he will come. When the night is dark and I hear the dull heavy breathing of all asleep in my home, I creep out and go down the road and stand at our old trysting-place, under the carouba tree, and I call him louder and louder till the hills seem to ring with the sound of his name."

"What is that for?" said the old woman, shuddering. "In the gay haunts of Florence and Turin he cannot hear you; if he is false he would not heed you."

"But," said Colomba, fearfully, "there, alone in the chill moonlight, when I call him, I feel as if one certainty at least would be mine. At that time my spirit so cries on him, so yearns for him, that if he were dead, if his soul were in the spirit world it would come to me. I should know it, I should feel it, and the certainty would be—not happiness—— Ah, heaven! despair! yet peace, even as the despair that accepts, is peace compared to the despair that is born of suspense."

"He is not dead," said Lalla, thoughtfully.

As she spoke the moonlight flitted over her strange wrinkled face. The half-closed eyes, the working mouth, the strong grey hair which blew back from her thin bony brows gave her the ghastly look of the Strega.

Colomba trembled. "Not dead? You know it?" she faltered.

"I know it. I am certain of it."

"Then where is he? Why does he not come? He is mine. We have stood together before the priest. If he is alive he should be here. Where is he?"

"He is false!"

Colomba started up. She held the old woman with a grasp of steel, her burning eyes fixed on the withered ghastly face. There certainly must have been some breeze or wind stirring in the little room, for it seemed as if her long black hair blew backward also so that one might have fancied that it stood on end, and that the white set face, colourless as wax, with parted lips and brows bent into a line of intolerable anguish, was that of a spirit in torment.

"Tell me the truth," she exclaimed. "What do you know?"

"I see him," cried Lalla, raising her long skinny finger in the air. "It is moonlight there, it is shining on marble steps, the air is full of the perfume of flowers, and the sound of plash of fountains. The silence is only broken by the croak of the frog, and the shrill rattle of a thousand cicadas. In and out of the ilex trees I can see the fireflies dance—myriad brilliant sparks. I can see her. She is very beautiful! As she passes by, the black cypress shadows flit one by one over her milk-white gown till she stands in the broad light by the fountain, one hand holding back the white folds, the other held fast in his."

'What are you telling me? What do you see?" gasped Colomba.

Lalla's eyes were fixed on vacancy, a strange kind of phosphoric green light like that of a cat seemed to gleam in them.

"Hush, hush, child!" she said. "Do not disturb me. Am I not right? Did you not wish to consult the Strega?"

"It is true, then? You are a Strega?"

A new and awful terror seized upon Colomba. She held the very name of Strega in unconquerable fear; and now she found herself actually in the power and under the influence of one of these terrible beings whose powers she did not for a moment doubt. The old woman's strange fixed gaze held her under a spell.

"Will you hear the rest of my vision?" she said. "Believe me, my Cola, it is always wholesome in this world to know the truth."

"Go on! go on!"

"The lady I see is beautiful—not the black beauty of the night such as yours. She is fair, with eyes blue as the gentian flower, and hair like the golden wine of Asti. He bends down to speak to her. The moonlight shines into his eyes. I see in them the light of love, and know that to this woman he has surrendered his faith, his honour, and his heart."

Colomba fell back on the pillow, every trace of colour had left even her parched and burning lips.

"He is false!" hissed the old woman. "He is gone; not because

he is dead; not because the will of heaven has stepped between you, but because to the heart's core he is false!"

Colomba was panting hard, the lips were drawn back from her teeth, her hands were convulsively twisted in her hair.

There was a pause; then Lalla began again, speaking in a harsh whisper:

"When a great love is thus thrown back upon itself it changes into disdain."

"Into hate, Lalla!—fierce hate!"

The words were so sudden, so fierce, that the old woman started. She smiled, a hideous smile contorting her face with a ghastly mirthless spasm.

"That is brave!" she said. "When one no longer lives to love, one may live to hate! To natures such as yours and mine some master passion is necessary. Do I not read you aright, Cola? How if this master-passion lead from love to hate, from hate to revenge! Would it not content you?"

"It would be—almost happiness."

"Happiness is a tame word! It would give you triumph! joy! It is the only thing left to you now—revenge!"

Colomba clasped her hands, her terror was rising again. "You—you are a Strega?" she faltered.

"Yes."

"And you can give me this revenge!"

"Yes; but it is costly."

The old woman now suddenly sat down and resumed her distaff, as if she had done with the subject.

Colomba raised herself again, looking at her fearfully, the words had sunk deep into her breast. "I must think," she exclaimed, "I must think! Your words must not drive me mad!"

Lalla rose up and began to arrange the disordered bed-clothes, Colomba controlling her impulse to shrink from her touch for fear of offending her.

"Think no more, child," said Lalla. "Go to sleep, you will need all your strength to-morrow."

Colomba echoed the words "to-morrow," and turned her head away.

Lalla went to her own couch, muttering low to herself, and in five minutes was asleep. Not so Colomba. All through the rest of the night the girl lay brooding, her eyes wide open, shining with sombre gloom, her hands twisted together. When morning dawned and its cold wan light stole into the room there was a great change in the grandly beautiful face on which it fell. All womanly softness, all sorrow and sweetness, had passed away, leaving a strong pitiless hardness in their place, so stern, so merciless that the old woman who had wrought the change trembled before her own handiwork.

CHAPTER XII.

As the morning broke, exhausted nature resumed her sway, and Colomba fell into a heavy sleep.

Very silently old Lalla crept out of the house, huddling on a cloak and tying a dark kerchief round her rough grey head. White silvery mists hung in the valleys. Every blade of grass, every leaf and flower was wet with dew, the white gleams of the young sun turned all into sparkling diamonds.

The door of Bondi's house stood open. Within, with slow step and heavy eyes, Maddalena was preparing food for the men ; already Carlo's guttural tones were stirring up the weary mules, those patient beasts of burden who now never knew the luxury of sufficient rest.

Old Lalla knocked at the door. Maddalena looked up, and, conquering the aversion or dread she had always had of the old woman, invited her in.

"You are abroad early, good Lalla," she said ; "I thought ours was the earliest household astir in Maiano, for none work so hard early and late as my father and the boys."

"I thought he would wish for news of Colomba," said Lalla, accepting the bowl of goat's milk and hunch of black bread which Maddalena held out to her.

"She is better?"

"She sleeps now, but she has lost much blood. Good morning, Bondi!" she exclaimed as the old man came heavily down the ladder, only answering her greeting with a sullen nod. "Do you not wish for news of your daughter?"

"Not I!" he answered savagely. "Much use you would be with your broken promises."

"My promises hold good," she said, nodding her head sagely. "I promised to cure Cola of her love and her sorrow, my promise is half fulfilled. I shall soon call upon you to fulfil yours. A gold piece, Bondi mine!—a gold piece!"

Maddalena whispered anxiously in her father's ear. "What does she mean, father? Have you dealings with her? She is not to be trusted, people whisper of her that she is a witch."

"Maddalena! Maddalena!"

Piero's voice was calling her from outside ; he was harnessing the mules to their cart, and wanted her to come out and speak to him. The patient beasts stood first on one side, then on the other, vainly trying to rest their trembling limbs. The stone-waggons on the quarries are fearfully heavy, the burden on the animals great. Mercifully, it does not last long. They die very soon, worn out in their prime.

"Maddalena, what does the old witch say about Cola?"

"She is better, she still sleeps."

Piero had a softened look in his face, "I am sorry I brought so much of my father's anger on her," he said.

"You will not do it again?" said Maddalena; "I grant that it is hard to put up with her, but you will be patient, Piero."

He gave a quick impatient sigh. He was a man of few words; he finished fastening the scarlet tassel under the chin of the quiet Biondino, then with a guttural sound of encouragement put the cart into motion and went off. Nobody waited for any one, far down the hill Carlo's voice came back to them, singing snatches of a little minor song, each couplet ending on a long-drawn minor note.

Lalla had gone close to old Bondi and said low in his ear, "Already I have half earned the gold piece, your daughter's love turns to hate. All will be well."

He shrank a little away from her as he answered, "That is well, Lalla, you shall have your reward."

Carlo's voice in the far distance came back sweet and musical to their ears.

Then he passed away down the road, and old Bondi, shaking himself like some rough old dog, followed him down to his work. Lalla went back to her own house. She opened the door softly, and gave a smile of satisfaction as she perceived that her guest was still sleeping.

All through the day the girl slept on; she was exhausted by loss of blood, and her strong nature recruited itself by sleep. It was a very profound sleep. Now and then when some noise from without penetrated its depth, the shrill crow of a distant cock, the lilt of a song, or some movement of old Lalla's, Colomba's brow would contract as if with pain, and she would throw out her hands with a restless moan.

Lalla did not disturb her; she was busy in her own way; she was glad that those fierce dark eyes should be closed for a time.

CHAPTER XIII.

Up the steep mountain pass one was coming home whose advent had always brought a gleam of joy into Cola's life. Nino Dori was in the diligence which was slowly breasting the hill.

Nino's eyes were brilliant, they were so full of joy and sunshine that a passer-by going down the hill nodded and smiled with pleasure, saying lustily, "I need not ask how the world goes with you, Nino? I see success in your face!"

Nino laughed outright, crying, "Thanks for the good omen and a happy journey to you."

The man went on at a long swinging pace down the hill, and the diligence horses strained on their upward way.

It was not wonderful that Nino looked joyous. The time had come to which he had looked forward with the one great longing of

his life. He never even dreamt of any obstacle arising in his path. Colomba had always pined for a wider sphere than this little mountain home. It had come to him through his own strong energy to offer her this emancipation, to carry her away to a new life full of brightness and variety, and altogether enriched and completed by his own great overpowering love.

He would be so good to her. She should be his princess, his queen. He knew his own great genius, he knew that every day the world would recognise it more and more, and that the way to wealth lay before him. He never considered that this woman whom he worshipped was wild, untaught, undisciplined, a mere beautiful savage, beside whom even little Pippa was civilised, for she had learnt the discipline of a great city. Something there must have been in Colomba beyond the magnetism of her magnificent beauty, something which had so strangely attracted to her feet two men so vastly superior to herself, so capable of appreciating higher things. What it was, it was very difficult to analyse. There was no tenderness about her, only a wild ungoverned nature. Perhaps the attraction lay in the infinite possibilities and capabilities of such a nature, the very sense of danger, the chance of falling upon something altogether rough and unlovely lending zest to the flight of imaginative conjecture.

Nino was not blind to this danger, but he adored her.

Fortune, hope, love, triumph before him—all so close, within the very grasp of his hand, his feelings overpowered him. He clasped those long slender nervous fingers together, in which lay the secret of his success, and raised his eyes upward as though he would pierce the glory of the sky itself to lay his thanksgiving at the foot of the throne of God.

The Angelus bell was clanging as the diligence put on a spurt at the end of its journey, and with jingle of harness, whoops from the driver, and crackings of whip like pistol shots on the air, they drew up before the inn.

Several of the villagers, men and women, were standing about there, and they gave a little shout of welcome when they saw Nino.

"Nino! Nino Dori has come!" they exclaimed, crowding round him, holding out eager welcoming hands.

Nino sprang to the ground. He had forgotten all now—his own insignificant stature, the deformity which had always seemed to him so terrible, so obvious when he was surrounded by these sturdy sons of the stone quarries. He grasped hand after hand, pleased and gratified by the warmth of their welcome.

"My friends! my good comrades!" he exclaimed. "How are you all? Ha, Carlo! is that you? How are all at home?"

Carlo shook his head roughly and walked away; he did not care to be questioned.

Nino was startled.

"Is anything wrong with Carlo?" he asked, anxiously.

"Wrong? no," cried an old woman who was standing in the background. "But they have all been more or less odd since Colomba's marriage."

"Colomba's marriage?"

What could this strange odd feeling be that came suddenly rushing over Nino's brain. Everything seemed to get thick and indistinct, then blood-red; the world was full of some great hammering noise, everywhere, all round, in the earth, in the air, it could not be only in his head.

"Stand back! Give him air!" said a voice—a voice that sounded very far off. Somebody was supporting him, and he was falling, down, down, down.

"Poor Nino!"

It was a kindly, sympathetic voice that spoke; a hand was unfastening the collar which seemed to suffocate his throat, giving him air, enabling him to breathe again.

Very far off, as in a dream or semi-swoon, he heard voices talking about him.

"What caused this? What is the matter?"

"It is a touch of the sun, a rush of blood to the head, Signor Priore. We must bleed him. It will soon be all right."

"How did it come on? Here, give me the knife, cut this button also. Now dash water on him. See, he is better!'

"It must have been those words; he always loved Colomba well, and——"

A faint shiver passed over the pale face. The Priore, who was supporting Nino's head, spoke gently:

"You are better, my friend? You suffer no pain?"

But Nino could not speak yet. He opened his great, soft, dark eyes, and looked up with a wondering wistfulness in their gaze.

"Drink this!"

They had brought some strong sour red wine. The Priore put it to his lips, and he swallowed it. Presently he came to himself and sat up, looking white as a sheet.

"I am ashamed," he began, trying to rise to his feet, but unable to do so without help from strong hands round him.

"Signor Priore," he faltered.

"My friend! Yes, come with me. It will be best so. We will talk. You are still weak, lean on my arm; come in here. Good friends, leave him with me a little while; I will come out and tell you how he is."

And the good Priore supported him into the inn-parlour, and placed him on a chair.

"Is it true? Is it true?" said Nino, looking up at the priest.

"Yes, my friend, it is true, if you mean that Colomba Bondi is married. I am grieved that you should feel it thus."

Nino had covered his face with his hands. In spite of all his

efforts, his bitter struggle to preserve his manhood, the hot tears rained from his eyes.

"It is a very sad story," said the Priore gravely, "and one which gives me more anxiety than anything that I have known in the place since I first came here. Poor Colomba might have been a happy young wife—your wife perhaps, Nino. Ah, that would have rejoiced my very soul! But as it is——"

"Do not tell me that she is not happy," cried Nino, throwing out his hands with a gesture almost of despair; "I can bear anything but that! Oh, my God, spare me that!"

The Priore sighed. "Happy! Alas, poor Cola is so miserable that we do not know where to turn to comfort her."

"But what is it? To whom is she married? Not to Giorgio or Zei? Any one of them would have been good to her. Tell me the worst!"

"The man whom Colomba married is a gentleman," said the Priore slowly. "He came up to Maiano with a friend of his, a young, very good-looking soldier. They called each other Livio and Gian. The younger of the two, Livio, won the heart of our poor Colomba."

"Yes, yes, and—?"

"They were to be married, sorely against the will of the older man Gian. He said all he could to prevent it, and finally he quarrelled with his friend, and went away, leaving him here alone."

"Yes, yes!"

"Colomba was radiantly happy, and all went well until the wedding-day. The ceremony was done, the Church's rites were completed—they needed but to go up to San Pietro for the civil ceremony—when just as we quitted the church door, Colomba still gaily dressed out in her bridal gown, and her mother's pearls, when post-haste, fast as a man could drive, Gian rushed back upon the scene. He had come to carry off his friend with an order from the colonel for their immediate recall."

"And he went—the coward, the traitor!"

"Yes, he went. The order could only have been disobeyed at the cost of honour. They consulted me. I could do no otherwise than give my reluctant consent to the fact that there could be no disobeying."

"And he? Was it all a ruse? Was he expecting a rescue?"

The Priore's face was sadly troubled. "I do not think so," he answered. "This is the mysterious part of the whole story, the poor boy (he is little more than a boy, so young, so handsome!) was in despair, unutterable despair. But what can one say? I know nothing of his circumstances. He may be dependent on his chances in the army for all I know; I could not have urged him to do what would have ruined them for ever. In this matter it seems to me that this friend Gian, or whatever his name may be, was right—that it was impossible to hesitate."

"But the civil marriage—the legal forms, that—?"

"Was left undone."

Nino looked up at the Priore, his hands were convulsively pressed together. "It is a trick!" he exclaimed, "I have heard of its having been done before! He will claim her as his wife—women know nothing of these things; she has received the blessing of the church, she believes it to be sufficient—perhaps you also believe it to be sufficient?" he almost shouted, catching at the Priore's arm.

"Be calm, Nino," said the Priore quietly; "listen to what I say. It ought to be sufficient. That it has ceased to be so is one of the sins that bring down God's curse on this unhappy land, but I have never called it so. I told Colomba and I told her husband that until they had signed their names before the registrar their marriage was not legal. He has never written to her or sent her news of himself. He has passed out of our lives like a dream—gone, utterly gone, as if he had no existence—"

"And Cola?"

The Priore shrugged his shoulders. He did not know what to say to satisfy the yearning, agonised pity in this man's face. It dawned upon him suddenly, strongly, that Colomba was wonderfully unworthy of such love, such intense solicitude. He could not say that she was bearing well this desperate sorrow and bitter humiliation. He could not describe her fits of ungovernable fury with all around her, her sullen fierce despair, her savage gloom.

"It is a hard trial," he said, and Nino groaned, for there was an intuitive knowledge in his breast of how she was bearing it. He had no illusions on the subject of his love, he knew her as she was, but his strong faithful nature clung to her in such a fashion that her faults affected him no more than the faults of a naughty child affect the love of its mother.

"I will go to her," he said, rising to his feet with some difficulty. "This foolish weakness will soon pass. I—I have been working very hard of late, and a city life is not so strengthening as yours in the mountain air. Is she at home?"

"No," answered the Priore, "she is not at home. It is a sad business, but you will understand it. Our people are not patient. They were tired of her monotonous gloom—her father was harsh to her."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nino. It was almost like physical pain to him that any one should be harsh to her now in her sorrow, her great misery.

"It was better that she should leave Bondi's house; he is a violent man, you know. She is with old Lalla. She had met with an accident through some foolish quarrel with her father."

Nino's teeth clenched. "A blow?" he said.

"Yes, but it need not have been severe but for the fact of a buckle striking her. She is none the worse; indeed, Maddalena tells me that she is better to-day, quieter, more reasonable, poor unhappy child!"

"Have you no idea, no theory even, about this man?"

The Priore threw out his hands. "What can one think?" he said. "That he was called away by necessity I do not for a moment doubt. His despair was perfectly unassumed, I will answer for that. That he has made no sign, must be due to some strange accident. Perhaps his family have got hold of him and compelled him to give her up."

"Impossible!"

"Well, it is only one conjecture out of many! My own most reasonable suspicion is that he is dead, and if so, we shall have no clue, nothing to guide us. We do not even know his name, that would have transpired before the registrar, but as you know——"

Nino passed his hand painfully across his eyes. "It is very strange," he said. "How long ago do you say it was?"

"Six months. It was May when he first came here, they were married in June, and now it is already November."

"I will go to her now," said Nino, brokenly. Six months! All that time he had been working for her so brightly, beginning to see before him dazzling visions of hope fulfilled, revelling in the thought that every day was bringing him nearer to his happiness! All that time she had been already lost to him. It was hard to bear.

Nino wrung the good priest's hand; he did not look up, feeling that kind compassionate eyes might unman him, but he went out to seek Colomba with his head sunk low on his breast.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lalla was standing outside her door when Nino came up to it, waiting to stop his entrance. She would allow no one to see her patient that day, she said. Colomba had had a severe wound, had lost much blood; she must be allowed perfect rest, no unnecessary excitement.

Nino acquiesced sorrowfully enough. If it were bad for Colomba to see him, he would not urge it; he accepted the decision of the old hag who had constituted herself village nurse without dispute, and he turned away with a very heavy heart and slow step to seek Maddalena.

Maddalena had always been a good kind friend to him, she would be able to tell him many details that he longed yet dreaded to hear.

Maddalena was at home, she was making bread; she went on busily with her occupation of kneading while she talked to him. Long ago Maddalena had taught herself that to be incessantly occupied, her hands always busy with household work, or distaff and spinning-wheel, was the only way to keep out of her ears the boom of the blasting rocks. Like the murmur of the sea locked up in the heart of a shell, it was never quite absent from her brain.

Her kind sympathetic eyes gave him a sense of refuge and help.

He sat down by the table at which she was working, leaning his head mournfully on his hand.

Nino did not mean to complain, but the words of complaint burst out involuntarily under the touch of sympathy,

"Oh dear Maddalena! why does God send this trial? Why did He let me come too late?"

She shook her head. "Things seem to be all wrong often enough, Nino mine," she said tremulously. "But we know it is only because we cannot understand. God sends it."

"It is very bitter!"

"Patience! who knows? Perhaps he will come back and Cola be happy again."

"But I, Maddalena—I?"

She wiped away a few tears. "We do not matter, Nino, do we? We are quiet, humble souls, who know what it is to take our pain quietly and thank God it is no worse. It does not matter for us."

And Nino accepted her valuation of him, though he could not but be aware of his own genius—a genius that would make all Europe single him out as the finest wood-carver of his day; yet with the most perfect humility he accepted the fact that their pain, his and his companion's, was of no consequence, no account whatever, beside that of this wild undisciplined peasant girl whom they both adored.

"I have not asked much of Heaven," he said bitterly. "Only to take away my own insignificant life now that it is no longer worth living. But such prayers are accounted impious."

"It is a blessing that our good angels never take them up at all," said Maddalena, placing another lump of dough on her kneading-board. "For instance, if I had been taken at my word and allowed to die, who would have looked after my father and the boys? As for you, Nino, to be sure you are not of much use, but all the same one loves those to whom one is accustomed, and no one has ever been such a friend to Cola."

"But now! what can I do now? Oh, Maddalena, my friend, I thought to have taken her home as my wife. I have money now. I have a home."

Maddalena brushed away her tears. "It is a pity," she said. "But do not look so sad; there are others to be had, and Cola would not have made you a good wife. She is too self-willed, too beautiful. She can do nothing, she can neither sew nor cook. In everything I have waited on her hand and foot. I have spoilt her I fear."

"She would have been my queen. You remember Pippa, Maddalena? You have heard me speak of her."

"Yes."

"She would have waited on her, been her slave, her grateful, loving slave."

"Well, well, Nino, all the worst sorrow of this weary world lies in those words of yours and mine—'All this might have been.'"

And she fell to kneading the bread hard and fast, with tremulous work-worn fingers.

Nino did not speak for a moment, absorbed in his own cares; the under-current of the old sorrow in every word and action of his companion escaped his sympathy.

It is often thus in life. When great sorrow falls on a shrinking mourner, sympathy is all on the alert; but the days roll on, the sufferer gets broken in to suffering, used to it, he wraps it round with a certain conventional calm and patience, placidity grows into cheerfulness. All the friends and neighbours rejoice, they are relieved that the strain of sympathy is relaxed, no longer drawn upon.

But how is it with the sufferer himself? The old agony is there, living, burning, eating into all the joy of life. It is so integral, so completely part of himself, that now and then when the never-ceasing pain wells up and betrays itself, he is astonished, pained, thrown back upon himself when he finds that he is not understood. That the grief to him, so real, so living, to his friends has long been dead and buried in forgetfulness.

Nino threw up his hands and cried aloud in a voice of anguish.

"Kind Heaven! it might have been." Then he leant forward, buried his face in his hands, and burst into a passion of tears.

They were thus—Nino still weeping, Maddalena sorrowfully watching him—when the door was suddenly thrown open.

Nino sprang to his feet, Maddalena started back, for there, framed in by the rough doorway, her tall figure dark against the intense blue of sky and lofty mountain, stood Colomba.

She had wound a white kerchief round her head and over her wounded throat; she was very pale, so ghastly pale, that a long weal across her forehead stood out with startling distinctness, a blue angry bruise. Maddalena started forward

"Cola!" she exclaimed, "you should not be here. Lalla said you must rest. Oh, my child, my child, what a blow!"

"It is nothing," said Colomba, hastily pushing back her hair. "Let me come in. The room seems dark and whirling round."

Maddalena led her to a chair. She was reeling from weakness and faintness.

"You should be in bed," said her sister tenderly.

Nino had drawn back into the shadow. He was horrified at the change he saw in her. He stood with clenched hands, and teeth set hard.

"Lalla went out," said Colomba, leaning her aching head against her sister. "So I escaped; she wanted to keep me a prisoner in bed, but I came away. It is nonsense. I heard that Nino had come, and I wanted to see him at once. Nino!"

"I am here, Cola."

"Come forward. I cannot see you. I want to speak to you."

He advanced gently and took her hand in both of his ice-cold hands. She drew away with a little impatient shiver.

"You are very cold," she said.

He could not master himself sufficiently to speak to her calmly. He gnawed his white quivering lips.

"Nino," she cried, with a sudden wild, passionate entreaty in her voice, "I want you to take me away with you—to Florence—to Rome! Anywhere away from here."

"Colomba!" cried Maddalena, horrified.

"You will take me, Nino, will you not? I care not where. I want to go to some great town where I may sit all day long in a window overlooking some wide street, waiting and watching till my husband passes by, and I can——"

"What—what will you do?"

"Kill him!" she hissed out suddenly.

"You talk wildly," said Maddalena. "Cola, this must not go on. See! you have angered all your friends in Maiano; now you will anger Nino also."

Colomba cast a glance at him full of proud confidence. Nino was her slave, nothing that she could ever say or do would drive him from her.

"Ask what you will, Colomba," he said eagerly. "I am your servant—I will do it."

"Then take me away. If I stay here I shall go mad."

"Hush, hush, Colo!" cried her sister. "You are mad already. Do you know what you ask?"

"It will be all right," said Nino, hoarsely. "Pippa will receive her gladly; she can lodge with her. There is no difficulty."

"And you will leave me, Cola? Go away among strange folk in your sorrow like this?"

"You will be well rid of me; you cannot even pretend to regret it," said Colomba, harshly. Maddalena wrung her hands.

"But what will the world say? What will my father say?"

"There can be nothing to say," cried Nino, eagerly. "I will take her to Pippa. It is but fifteen hours in the diligence. Pippa will receive her with open arms."

"Arrange it as you will," said Cola, indifferently. She shaded her eyes with both hands, trying to steady herself, and control the vague swaying of all things animate and inanimate around her.

"Only take me away," she repeated.

"With the help of God I will be to her the most true and loyal brother," said Nino. Maddalena put out her hard, work-worn hand, and pressed it with a pressure on his shoulder, strong in proportion to her feeling. She could not speak.

"Cola," said Nino, breaking silence, "when do you wish to start?"

"To-morrow," she answered, dreamily.

"Impossible!" cried her sister; "you are too weak."

Then Colomba rallied all her powers. "To-morrow, Nino," she said. "I am glad it is settled. I shall sleep to-night."

She rose to her feet, staggering a little as she did so, and turned to leave the room. Maddalena threw open her arms.

"Cola, my darling, my child, will you not stay with me to-night? Oh, what shall I do without you?"

"No," said Colomba, "I will not stay. I shall be a good riddance to all here."

She would not see her sister's outstretched arms and streaming eyes. She put her aside and went out, touching the walls and door to steady her steps.

"Nino, Nino!" cried Maddalena, piteously. "Is she heartless—quite heartless?"

Nino still believed in the ideal of his artistic nature.

"Not heartless," he said, brokenly—"heart-broken."

To be continued.)

WHITE WINGS.

I LAY me down in time of woe,
  Sure that my soul will fly
Into a land where it will know
    No misery.
Thy white wings, O my angel! keep
All terror from me whilst I sleep.

I lay me down in time of bliss,
  Sure that my soul will fly
Into a land where it will miss
      No ecstasy.
Thy white wings, O my angel! keep
My treasures for me whilst I sleep.

I lay me down by night or day,
  Sure that however rude
May be the thorns upon my way,
      Whatever is, is good.
Thy white wings, O my angel! keep
Me safely, do I wake or sleep.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

OF MODERATION.

ON moderation we have touched in treating of several subjects; but a few short paragraphs may here be added. Moderation is to the practical man what the laws of proportion and harmony are to the artist. It is the principle of means and ends, the law of economy, the rule of moving along the lines of least resistance. Never waste power; your reserve force is always the better increased as a store against sudden emergencies. And the idea can be applied in many ways. Sir Arthur Helps has well said that to overstate your case is far worse than to understate it. Never threaten and fail to act. Never make large promises, and fully fulfil all that you promise. Be frank, but be not too frank. Distinguish between friends and acquaintances, and let the golden mean be your standard. On moderation in this regard Guicciardini may be quoted:—

"A frank and liberal nature doth please universally, and it is in itself a generous thing; yet sometime it doth hurt a man: on the other hand, dissimulation is useful; but it is odious, and hath a taste of baseness, and is only needful through the evil natures of others. Wherefore I know not which is to be chosen; I think that the one may be used ordinarily, and yet the other not abandoned; that is, in thine ordinary and common course of living to use the first in such wise, as that thou gainest the name of frankness; and, nevertheless, in certain cases of importance, to use dissimulation, which is so much the more useful, and doth succeed the better to one who doth thus live, inasmuch as, through having a name for the contrary, it is more easily believed in him. In conclusion, I do not applaud him who lives continually in dissimulation and with artifice; but I excuse him who doth sometimes use it."

Bacon too has some good counsel on this point:—

"To say truth, nakedness is uncomely in mind as well as in body; and it addeth no small reverence to men's manners and actions if they be not altogether open. As for talkers and futile persons, they are vain and credulous withal; for he that talketh what he knoweth will also talk what he knoweth not. Therefore set it down that a habit of secrecy is both polite and moral. And in this part it is good, that a man's face give his tongue leave to speak; for the discovery of a man's self, by the tracks of his countenance, is a great weakness, and betraying by how much it is many times more marked and believed than a man's words."

And, on this point, Cotton, in his Essays, has a neat sentence:—

"He that openly tells his friends all that he thinks of them, must

expect that they will secretly tell his enemies much that they do *not* think of him."

Therefore let the reader observe moderation in his confidences as well as in his more open talk. For the worst of it is that too much is seldom enough. "Pumping after your bucket is full," says Julius Hare, "prevents it keeping so." Commit yourself by indiscreet speech once, and it lands you in a score of further indiscretions. So too in many other things than talking. Act therefore on the counsel: Say little; do and have done. The former is far the easier.

A. H. Japp, LL.D.

PARTED.

The wind is shrieking round the house,
  It shakes the young leaves from the tree
It breaks the blossomed orchard boughs,
  And sets the trim-trained creeper free;
It wails across the lonely moor,
  It beats against your window-pane;
It lays rough hands upon your door,
  And says I shall not come again.

Sitting alone, you listen, dear,
  And, empty-hearted, sigh and sigh;
You think how green June was last year,
  How golden-glorious was July;
You think of all the words I said,
  Under the trees a year ago;
Now that the wind wails overhead
  You wish you had not answered "No."

O Love, my Love, I may not come
  For many nights of wind and rain;
It will be long ere I come home,
  But yet I shall come home again.
I shall come home across the moor
  Some happy golden August day,
And find you knitting by your door,
  And then—you will not say me "Nay."

E. Nesbit.

THE WITCH'S SPELL.

MISTRESS O'Mally was a terrible old woman—a hard, cruel, wicked, terrible old woman. She had ruled at Castle O'Mally ever since her girlhood; and she had ruled with a rod of iron. Her people feared her with a blind, unreasoning fear, and hated her with a blind, unreasoning hate: and none among them hated and feared her more perfectly than did her forlorn young kinswoman, Norah O'Mally. Norah had spent as many of her twenty years as she could remember at Castle O'Mally; and many a time had she been punished for a childish fault by a beating from Mistress O'Mally herself; and many a time had she repented of such juvenile short-comings in the dark dungeons under the castle. It had been a terrible childhood, followed by a dreary girlhood; and yet it would have been difficult to find a more exquisitely beautiful form than that which was the earthly tenement of poor Norah's crushed and tortured spirit. Masses of red-gold hair crowned the queenly little head, which (if it had a fault) seemed almost too small for the tall and graceful figure; while Norah's eyes, as dark as night and as mysterious, sent a thrill through every heart which they took the trouble to look into. But these wonderful orbs had a gift above and beyond their beauty; they possessed a remarkable power of compelling whomsoever they chose to do their bidding—a power which nowadays would be called mesmeric or hypnotic, but which then, in that wild and primitive region, was considered as nothing less than witchcraft. Mistress Bridget O'Mally was fully aware of her young kinswoman's weird gift, and would gladly have given the two ferrety eyes out of her cruel old head for a pair like Norah's: failing this, she made Norah use this power as she (Bridget) willed; and the poor girl was far too much afraid of her hard task-mistress to even dream of disobeying her.

Now it came to pass, one bitter winter's day, that two snow-bound travellers sought shelter at Castle O'Mally, finding it impossible to push further through the deep drifts which threatened to bury them alive: and Mistress O'Mally, for a wonder, received them graciously, and set before them the best that she could offer, and pressed them to stay with her till the snow should abate and the wild roads be passable again.

The strangers were two officers, Captain Lennox and Captain McBean: the former as superbly handsome a young man as one could wish to see; the latter a somewhat disreputable old soldier very much the worse for wear. Such were the travellers who claimed the hospitality of Castle O'Mally: and (which is not to be wondered at) both fell in love with Norah O'Mally at first sight. Which sudden awakening of the tender passion did not escape the

lynx eye of the mistress of the castle, but served to add fuel to the already lighted fire of her hatred for and jealousy of her fair cousin's youth and beauty: so the cruel old woman laid her fiendish plans accordingly. That snowy day which brought the two strangers to Castle O'Mally was the birthday of happiness to Norah: she had never known before what it was to feel young and glad and joyous; but by the time that she and Henry Lennox had looked into one another's eyes and listened to one another's voices for a whole winter's evening, she had formed a fairly accurate idea of what perfect happiness was like.

Norah acted as Mistress O'Mally's maid, and when she had concluded her duties for that night, and was ready to repair to her own little vault of a chamber, she was recalled by her cousin, who said:

"Girl, I have a task for you to perform to-morrow."

"What is it?" asked Norah, with the blind submission that it was her custom to accord to her tyrant's behests.

The sharp eyes of Bridget O'Mally twinkled maliciously.

"You have got to use your witch power," she said, "and make Captain Lennox believe that I am young and beautiful. For he is the finest man that I have ever seen, and I have made up my mind to marry him."

The wonderful black eyes grew dim with fear and horror.

"Oh, not that, not that, Cousin Bridget!" cried the girl; "anything but that."

Mistress O'Mally laughed a dry little laugh.

Then Norah fell on her knees before her cousin, and besought her with bitter tears not to insist upon anything so cruel, so inhuman.

Mistress O'Mally continued to enjoy her laugh.

"You fool!" she cried, "do you think that you are going to have it all your own way with that pretty baby face of yours? Do you think I cannot see that you have already given your silly heart to this man, and that for the present his soft head is turned by your empty beauty? But understand that from to-morrow he is mine, and that it is you who will give me the priceless gift of your handsome lover's love. Ha! ha! ha!" and the old woman fairly shook with her fiendish amusement.

"I will *not* do it!" cried Norah, defiance taking the place of despair.

"Won't you?" giggled Mistress O'Mally. "And have you forgotten what it feels like to be flogged, and how cosy the dungeons are afterwards, and how none of my people would dare to interfere if I chose to starve you to death in there? But if your memory is short, my pretty child, and has forgotten all these trifling little details, you will soon be reminded of them, and I hardly think you will ever forget them again."

The unfortunate girl trembled, and lifted tearful eyes to her tormentor's jeering face; for well she knew that her cousin's were no

empty threats, but that all this and more could Mistress O'Mally do to her, and not one of the servants would dare to interfere or to tell afterwards what diabolical cruelty had done to death the defenceless orphan. So, fixing one look of unutterable despair on Bridget's hateful face, Norah rose from her knees, feeling that resistance to that inflexible will was impossible.

"If you are so anxious to have a lover," sneered Mistress O'Mally, "you can turn your attention to Captain McBean. He is in love with you already, my beauty."

"I hate him," sobbed Norah, with righteous indignation: "he is a wicked, horrid, nasty old man!"

"I quite agree with you," laughed Bridget sleepily, "but you shall marry him all the same, or my name isn't Bridget O'Mally. You can go now," added the old fiend; "I feel tired and drowsy, and want to go to sleep and dream about my handsome lover. So good-night, and pleasant dreams to you about Captain McBean, my sweet birdie!"

And poor Norah left her cousin's room with a tempest of silent rage in her tortured young heart.

The next morning Mistress O'Mally was up betimes, and drove Norah downstairs before her to do her dreadful bidding. The girl had not slept at all during the night, and there were great black rings round her beautiful eyes; but what cared old Bridget for the sorrows of women younger and fairer than herself? The two ladies entered the great hall of the castle together, and Mistress O'Mally perceived the object of her affections seated by the fire. He rose politely at the entrance of the ladies, but Bridget did not fail to note, with a throb of anger, that though his civil words were addressed to her, his admiring eyes sought Norah.

"Do my bidding, girl!" she exclaimed, below her breath; and the girl, feeling the impotence of opposition, fixed her wonderful eyes full on the innocent victim. The strong man sank back at once into his chair, and his glassy stare showed that Norah's hypnotic power had done its work. Then in a mechanical voice the younger Miss O'Mally proceeded to say the words which her tyrant dictated.

"You see Mistress Bridget O'Mally," she began, pointing to the hideous old woman beside her.

"Yes," replied a hollow voice, most unlike the usual cheerful tones of Henry Lennox.

"She is young and beautiful," continued Norah; "and you love her with all your heart. You are wild with love for her, and you will marry her within a week from now. Do you understand?"

"I understand," answered the unearthly voice of the victim. "I love Mistress Bridget O'Mally with all my heart, and will marry her within a week from now."

Then Norah woke her unconscious subject and went out of the room, leaving him and his elderly admirer together.

For a moment the captain looked dazed, and then, as his glance fell on the old woman standing beside him, an expression of such admiration animated his features as it was impossible to misread. He rose at once, and took her skinny hand into his strong one.

"How are you this morning, dear lady?" he inquired tenderly.

"Very well, thank you," giggled Bridget, with delight at this unwonted solicitation for her well-being. "And yourself, Captain?"

"Oh, I am all right," replied the soldier; "but I think our hard journey through the snow must have wearied me somewhat, for I have actually been asleep again since I came downstairs—asleep and dreaming of you," he added, gazing into the wrinkled face with such passionate devotion that Mistress O'Mally felt inclined to scream for joy at the success of her diabolical scheme.

"What did you dream about me?" asked Bridget, with an assumption of arch coquetry, which would have been revolting to any man in his senses.

"I hardly dare to tell you." And the brave soldier fairly trembled with fear of his idol's displeasure.

But Mistress O'Mally coaxed and cajoled until she got her own way.

"Well, if you insist upon my telling you, I (whose highest honour and happiness consist in obeying your lightest command) cannot say you nay," said the captain at last. "I dreamed that I loved you madly—that you and you alone were the lady of my choice; and in my dream I swore that I would win you as my bride, and that ere many days had passed. And listen, darling," he continued, seizing both her hands and drawing her nearer to him, "when I awoke and saw you standing beside me, I knew that my dream had come true, and that henceforth I could never find happiness apart from you. I know I am a rough soldier, dear one, unfit to mate with your sweet beauty; but won't you try to love me a little, Bridget, because I love you so much?"

Then Mistress O'Mally dropped her wicked old head on to the captain's broad shoulder, while he covered her sly face with kisses, and whispered in her ear such nonsense as only lovers talk. Truly Norah's spell had been all too potent for the simple-minded, unsuspecting warrior—alas for him!

Mistress Bridget was the first to seriously take up the parable again.

"Captain," she began; but was stopped by the kisses of the infatuated swain.

"Hush, hush, my pretty one!" he whispered. "You must never call me that again—you must say *Harry*."

"Harry, then," giggled the lady fair.

"Say, *my own dear Harry*," commanded the bewitched wooer.

"My own dear Harry," repeated the wicked old witch, with infantine obedience.

"Well, sweetheart, what is it?"

"Don't you think we might have some breakfast?" suggested the lady, who had reached an age when no love-making, be it never so charming, could stand her in stead of meat and drink.

Her lover's face fell somewhat at this mundane interruption to his day-dream; but he submitted to his lady's will.

"First tell me that you love me," he entreated.

"I love you," shrieked Mistress O'Mally, flinging her withered arms round her lover's stalwart neck in a transport of fiendish joy.

And then the twain went off to take their breakfast, and to break to the other two members of the party what they had done.

The next few days seemed, to Mistress O'Mally and her gallant soldier, to fly by on the wings of the wind: he was so completely enthralled by the spell which had been cast upon him, that he had neither eyes nor ears for any one but his Bridget; and she, who had never had a lover before, was so intoxicated with joy at the sight of so brave a wooer at her feet, that she was simply beside herself with senile delight. But though to the normal eye she was even more repulsive in this amorous mood than she had been in her former malicious one, the captain was blind to all her imperfections, and seemed day by day to become more infatuated. He insisted upon fixing an immediate date for the wedding, and he had no difficulty in inducing his lady-love to agree to this arrangement. In consequence of this absorption of the lovers in one another, the gentleman's brother-officer and the lady's young kinswoman were left entirely to their own or each other's devices, whichever they pleased. Captain Lennox just now had no thoughts for anything save love-making; and Captain McBean was reduced to pretty much the same state; so the wintry days did not hang heavy on the gallant warriors' hands, nor were the gentlemen at all anxious for the imprisoning snow to melt, and so release them from their respective ladies' sides. They were happy enough, but not so Mistress O'Mally. She was filled with rage to think that the love and admiration, which she found so delightful and which were only hers by deceit and sorcery, were Norah's by simple right of her youth and beauty; and she swore an oath that when once her adored lover was united to her by marriage (a bond which the withdrawal of Norah's spell would be powerless to break), she would turn the hapless girl out of her doors for ever, and never permit that beautiful face to be seen inside Castle O'Mally again, lest her husband's now distorted fancy should return to its first and fairer love. Wherein Mistress Bridget showed her accustomed wisdom of the serpent, unalloyed in her case by any adulteration of the harmless dove.

The wedding-day dawned; and Mistress Bridget commanded her old chaplain, Father Paul (who feared her as he feared his ghostly enemy) to unite her to the man of her choice in the little chapel attached to the castle; and she further ordained (out of a spirit of

fiendish cruelty) that Norah should be her bridesmaid, so that the girl might have the anguish of seeing her rich kinswoman mated to the man whom she herself loved. The bridegroom had for his best man his friend and brother-officer. Norah's face was as white as death during the strange marriage, but otherwise she made no sign of what she was feeling. When the ceremony was concluded, and "I, Henry," had taken "thee, Bridget," for every vicissitude of human life, and the twain were united past all putting asunder, the bride turned round to her beautiful bridesmaid and thus addressed her :

"And now, my fair cousin, that I have secured a companion whose society is all that I could desire, I shall henceforth dispense with yours, and shall therefore expect you to leave my castle this very day. But—in that spirit of consideration which I have always shown you—I should be sorry to send you out into the world alone and unprovided for : so I will have you married at once to the gentleman who now stands beside you, so that the pleasing duty of providing for you (which has hitherto devolved upon me) will now be transferred to his broader shoulders."

Norah turned if possible a shade paler than she was before, and gasped out :

"Oh, no, no ! It is scandalous to dispose of me as if I were a bale of goods."

The bride took no notice of this appeal, but turned from the bridesmaid to the best man.

"This lady is as penniless as she is (according to your befooled taste) handsome. Have you any objection to wedding her here and now ? "

"Not the least," laughed the captain in triumph ; "in fact, it is the dearest wish of my heart to do so."

"Then, Father Paul, marry this couple at once," commanded the mistress of Castle O'Mally ; and the poor little chaplain—knowing by experience that that particular tone of her voice meant mischief—hastened to perform his tyrant's bidding.

Norah did not further rebel—what was the use when all of them were against her ?—but went through her part of the programme looking more like an exquisite marble statue than a living, breathing woman. When the second pair were united as securely as the first had been, the elder bride again took the word into her mouth :

"And now, my sweet cousin, your bridegroom and yourself will make yourselves scarce as speedily as possible, for my husband and I prefer to be left alone ; and you doubtless will also have much to say to the husband of your—can I say *choice ?* " and she laughed at her malicious little joke with a laugh that was full of triumph.

Then at last the marble statue awoke into a real woman, her face alight with scornful indignation.

"I will go willingly," she exclaimed in Gaelic, "from a house wherein I have known nought but misery all these years : but before

I go I have a word to say to you, Cousin Bridget. You made my childhood miserable and my girlhood desolate by your cruel ways; and you further decided to blight my womanhood by uniting me to a man whom I had told you I loathed. What had I done that you should hate me so mercilessly and punish me so maliciously? Have I not done your bidding all these years? then why should you ordain that so hideous a lot should be mine? But stop!"

And now—before Bridget could prevent her—Norah made the movement whereby she released from her hypnotic spell those who had lain under it. And lo! The first-wedded couple gazed at each other for an instant as if transfixed; and then simultaneously exclaimed!

'You abominable old fright!"

"You hideous old frump!"

For the bridegroom suddenly discovered that he had wedded an ugly old woman; and the bride perceived that she was married to Captain Henry McBean.

"Yes," continued Norah, still in Gaelic, while the twain stood gazing at each other in horror; "it was my only escape from the cruel fate which you had devised for me, so you have no one but yourself to thank for what has happened. Was I going to sacrifice not only myself (which was a small matter), but the man that I loved, to your diabolical device? No—a thousand times no! Therefore I made a desperate resolve. When—on that night—you said that you felt sleepy, you were really falling under my spell; and I then commanded you to love devotedly the first man whom you should see on coming downstairs next morning: and I took care that Captain Henry McBean, and not Captain Henry Lennox, was the first to meet your gaze. The rest you know, Mistress McBean."

During Norah's speech (whereof neither of the bridegrooms could understand a word) Bridget had been trembling from head to foot with baffled rage and disappointed malice; but at last she succeeded in giving utterance to the fury which possessed her.

"You minx! you wretch! you hussy!" she screamed, "how dare you trick me so? But I'll have my revenge. I'll scratch your wicked eyes out, you young viper, and leave you to rot in my darkest dungeon, you ill-conditioned serpent, you——"

And she was rushing forward with outstretched, claw-like fingers to put her horrible threat into execution, when Captain Lennox's strong arm held her back.

"Gently, madam—gently!" he cried; "you dare not lay a finger upon Mrs. Lennox. Remember that she is the wife of an English officer!"

ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER.

"SHE IS EXTREMELY PRETTY," SAID SIR FREDERIC; "YOU DO NOT IN THE LEAST RESEMBLE HER."

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1893.

MR. WARRENNE;

MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

CHAPTER XXX.

LOVE AND PHILOSOPHY.

EARLY in the autumn Alice and Captain Scudamore were married. Nothing could be simpler than the preparations—nothing quieter than the wedding. It was arranged that the young people should live at the Woodlands, and Mrs. Thorne promised to continue her superintendence of everything both in and out of doors.

Maud did not feel the parting with her sister as much as all the neighbours agreed that she would. It was hardly a separation. They met almost every day, and if it were too rainy for Alice and Maud to meet, Dick was sure to be sent to Erlsmede with some message to Mr. Warrenne or his daughter. Now that the great occupation of attending to Alice was withdrawn from her, Maud found more time to attend to herself; she read more, she played more; she improved herself in sketching; she was a great deal with Mrs. Creswick, whose society was always improving, and she felt, to her great delight, that she was more and more indispensable to her father's comfort every day. And the beautiful little Lyles were at the Ferns during their mother's absence abroad, and they held her company during the morning, while her father was out on his rounds. There was not a corner in Mr. Warrenne's house, not a nook of his garden that they did not know perfectly well. Karl was never at all surprised to see them come into the stable to pat the white horse, nor did the cook take it amiss when they found their way into the kitchen to ask for a bit of bread to feed the birds, or a draught of milk for themselves. There was a sense of liberty as soon as they got within the Warrennes' gate, which they could never quite feel before the stately Mrs. Creswick.

There was but one little drawback in the mind of Maud—she was very sensitive and a little jealous, and it was rather a trial to her to see that, for the first time in her life, she was not the first object with Mr. Scudamore. As she had said to him, she was quite willing that Dick should prefer her sister, but she did not care that *he* should like Alice better than herself. But it seemed to be a trial at the Woodlands between Captain Scudamore, his father, and Mrs. Thorne, which should spoil Alice the most completely. Mr. Scudamore and Mrs. Thorne doted on Alice because she had been the means of retaining Dick in England, and it is difficult to say which felt the most grateful to her for this piece of service.

Maud was sincerely rejoiced to find that month succeeded month and Captain Scudamore's attachment to her sister was as warm as ever. She had shared some of her father's misgivings on this subject. Nobody could doubt how ardent was his devotion to Alice before marriage; but she glanced with some dismay at the future. She had feared, with her father, that he might find his home monotonous, and gradually seek his pleasure elsewhere.

But the Woodlands was a home which might have contented a more fastidious person than Captain Scudamore. The house was excellent—more like an old manor-house than a farm, with its deep stone porch and large casement windows. It was beautifully situated, and as the property belonged to Mr. Scudamore, he had felt an interest in improving the woods and fields in appearance as well as in value. Broad belts of beech and hazel divided his fields, and screened the hills behind his house; and along these hedgerows Dick and Alice might be seen to wander, as the spring came on, gathering primroses and violets, very much like two lovers, although they had been married nearly six months. Mrs. Thorne fulfilled her promise of taking all the household cares off Alice: she accomplished her task with a great deal of bustle and boasting, it is true, but also with much skill and economy.

But one duty which had devolved on Alice since her marriage, Mrs. Thorne made no attempt to appropriate to herself. She could not avoid going more into society. Mr. Scudamore was much liked and respected by his neighbours, and everybody called upon her and invited her. She was obliged to return these visits with her husband. In this way she came to know numbers of people who had never troubled themselves about her as Alice Warrenne, and who knew nothing at all about Maud. It surprised her very much to find herself so completely taking precedence of her sister, but it did her no harm. She was as simple and modest, and as anxious to escape from notice, as she had ever been.

Maud was all the better for this alteration in affairs. With her quick intelligent mind, she had been everything to Alice, and she had felt her importance and usefulness. It gave her a feeling of self-reliance and decision, which, with her youth and beauty, was

rather engaging, but which might have been carried too far. She learned a useful lesson in finding that people could do as well without her as with her—it softened her estimate of herself. Mrs. Creswick used, inwardly, to hope that circumstances might work as favourable a change in her niece Florence. It was rather a favourite topic of hers, the use of circumstances in forming character, and the importance of not neglecting or perverting so valuable a means. Maud had the advantage of being able to discuss her feelings openly with Mrs. Creswick—and on this subject she could speak freely and without any bitterness. She felt that although not so much wanted, she was as well loved as ever by her sister, and that she had lost nothing, though Alice had gained in Mr. Scudamore's regard.

"I am anxious about Florence," said Mrs. Creswick, one morning as they were walking together in the garden at the Ferns; "she writes in bad spirits, and evidently in very poor health. My brother does not notice it, but at present he is so wrapped up in his infant son that he has no thoughts to spare for any one else."

"You are expecting them home soon, are you not?" asked Maud.

"Yes, in a few weeks; Mr. Reynolds wishes to purchase Heathfields, which is now for sale; and he ought to be here to conduct the affair himself."

"It is a fine place," said Maud, "and very near to Forrel Court."

"Ah! you can tell me how Mrs. Digby is," said Mrs. Creswick.

"She grows weaker every day," said Maud, sadly. "Papa fears she will not live through this month."

"A very interesting and very peculiar person," remarked Mrs. Creswick.

"Very much so," said Maud; "when, you know, she became acquainted with Leonard from that terrible accident, she would not let papa introduce Alice and me to her, though she often asked him about us. She said she felt that she had not long to live, and it was not worth while for either party to form an acquaintance that must so soon be broken. But we were saying something about Miss Reynolds."

"It is a great change for Florence," said Mrs. Creswick. "She had so entirely depended on being the mistress of her father's house, that it would require more philosophy than she possesses to bear his marriage with composure or indifference."

"But I should think it was *now* a matter of very little consequence to her," said Maud, "since I understand that she is shortly to leave her father's house for a house of her own."

"Yes, her marriage is to take place as soon as possible after her return," said Mrs. Creswick; "my friend, Mr. Courtenay, has borne her absence with exemplary patience; but there is now no reason for delay."

"People are surprised at almost every match that takes place," said Maud; "and therefore it is not a very new remark to say that I was surprised when I heard of this one."

"And why, my dear?" asked Mrs. Creswick, smiling.

"Because, from what I recollect of Mr. Courtenay, I should imagine that he would be very exacting in his choice of a wife; and Miss Reynolds was thought to be—rather—a flirt."

"I wish I could defend the best and most sensible men in their selection of a wife," said Mrs. Creswick. "Indeed, it can hardly be called a *choice*, so completely are they at the mercy of the first pretty face and engaging manner that comes in their way. But I am afraid Mr. Courtenay is wholly without defence; for I imagine his engagement to have been simply the result of pique."

"Of pique, my dear Mrs. Creswick? That is very bad! That gives me a low idea of his character!" said Maud, stooping to gather a wild hyacinth that sprang up among the moss which carpeted the secluded walk which they were pacing.

"I admit that it is wrong," said Mrs. Creswick; "but he is so great a favourite of mine, that I won't allow it to be low."

"Oh, Mrs. Creswick!" said Maud, "how poor a love must that be which can turn to pique! and how low a sense of justice must he have to vent his spite, not on the woman who has refused him (there would be some sense in that), but upon the woman who is credulous enough to believe that he speaks the truth—that his attentions are an earnest tribute to her merits, instead of a pitiful mortification at the indifference of another! I have a very shabby opinion of men; there's hardly one of them, however just in his dealings to his own sex, who would not lie like a coward to a woman! And I have a very base, pitiful idea, I can tell you, of this Mr. Courtenay!"

"Of course," said Mrs. Creswick, smiling at her young friend's vehemence, "you have a whole crowd of exceptions to that little statement of yours."

"Oh, yes! For instance, papa—and the Scudamores. I think that Dick—though you will understand me when I say that he is not at all the kind of person I envy Alice in having for a husband—is a plain-dealing, warm-hearted man, who could not, for it is not in his nature, swerve by one hair's breadth from the truth in any statement that he might make to any one, man or woman!"

"And you think that if a man makes an offer on any ground but that of love, he is guilty of an act of treachery?"

"The very basest!" exclaimed Maud. "He has no right to marry with any other feeling. You may *esteem* a friend—you may *regard* a neighbour—you may be *kind* to any one in distress, but these feelings are wholly insufficient to make such a tie as marriage sacred or even respectable! Not that I believe in all that nonsense," she added, turning to gather a piece of sweetbriar as she spoke, "except perhaps in the case of Alice and Dick."

"What shall we do to make you alter your opinion?" said Mrs. Creswick, laughing.

"Do you remember Shakespeare's beautiful lines?" continued Maud:

> "' . . . Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove.'

"Such a sentiment as that is worth accepting. No pique could induce a man to transfer such homage as that to another person! I think," she added, little imagining how near she was to the truth, "that if Leonard were to love, it would be after that fashion."

"That is the very finest of his sonnets," said Mrs. Creswick. "But sometimes, when I have doubted whether an idea is quite rational, I have amused myself by carrying it on a little farther; and if it then becomes absurd, I feel convinced that the first thought is unreasonable. Now I met with a sentence this morning in a little work of Balzac's, which is merely an exaggeration of the lines you have repeated. I don't often read or quote French authors, but as near as I can recollect the passage runs thus:

"L'amour, Madame la Duchesse, ce n'est pas d'aimer une noble femme, une Clarisse; le bel effort, ma foi! L'amour c'est de se dire, 'Celle que j'aime est une infâme, elle me trompe, elle me trompera, c'est une rouée; et d'y courir, et d'y trouver le bleu de l'éther, les fleurs du paradis—'"

"Oh, that is shocking!" said Maud. "Where a woman is unworthy it is contemptible of a man to persist in loving her. If Mr. Courtenay had this excuse for his pique, I acquit him. Ah! here come the children," she said, running forward to meet them. "Look, darlings! there is the postman at the green gates: now, a race to see which will get Aunt Creswick's letters!"

The two children set off down the gravel walk, and presently returned, Lucy with the letters, and Edward with a couple of newspapers.

"Good news, my dears!" said Mrs. Creswick, looking up from the letter she was reading; "papa and mamma are on their road home; they expect to be here about the end of the month."

The children raised their eyes to Mrs. Creswick's face, then turned uneasily to Maud, then looked at each other.

"Are *you* glad, Lucy?" said Edward, spreading out his fingers in the restless way children have when they are not comfortable.

"Oh, yes!" sighed Lucy.

"A dear little new brother coming home too, for you to play with," said Mrs. Creswick.

Lucy's eyes sparkled. "That will be nice," she said.

Edward hesitated. "There's Karl, and Undine, and the white horse," he said, as if trying to balance the two attractions.

"And the two new calves at the Woodlands," said Lucy.

"And Alice's tame pigeons," said Edward.

"Oh! and the guinea-pigs Dick bought her!" cried Lucy.

"And the young rabbits," said Edward.

"No, I'm not glad," said Lucy, taking firm hold of Maud's dress.

"How I wish they always lived with me!" said Maud, snatching her up, and covering her with kisses.

"Papa and mamma will be very glad to see their little ones again," said Mrs. Creswick.

"And so will they be glad when the time comes, naughty things," said Maud, caressing them.

"We must not expect too much from the affection of children," said Mrs. Creswick, when the little ones were at a distance with their hoops; "they live in the present, and the tame rabbits here would carry it against the little brother in Italy at any time. But we were talking about Florence and Mr. Courtenay."

"So we were," said Maud; "I was quarrelling with his pique, you know. But no doubt the match is agreeable to you, as you like him so much."

"As regards Florence, I rejoice," said Mrs. Creswick; "I never thought she would have married a superior man, for that I consider him, in spite of this one error of judgment. I think he will raise her character, and be watchful over her conduct; and in doing so is more likely to secure her lasting self-respect and happiness than if she married a man who fell in love with her beauty, and afterwards wearied of her levity and caprice."

"And with regard to *his* happiness?" said Maud.

"Florence is improving," said Mrs. Creswick; "her letters show that she is becoming more conscientious and more humble; she will feel, I hope, when she marries, that it is her duty to secure the esteem and attachment of her husband by every means in her power. They may go on smoothly together; and with regard to happiness, my dear Maud, this world is not its abode; and at my age I have seen so many fair prospects clouded, and so many love matches turn to discontent and misery, that I almost begin to think, with *Mrs. Malaprop*, that in matrimony it is safest to set out with a little aversion!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

PICKING COWSLIPS.

THE next morning Mr. Warrenne was summoned to see Mrs. Digby, who was seriously ill. As he was not likely to be home in time for church, he dropped Maud at the Woodlands, that she might accompany her sister and the Scudamores. She found Alice standing at the window of the breakfast-room, feeding her tame pigeons, which were clustered on the window-sill. Captain Scudamore, standing

beside her, was holding some peas in his hand, which she took one by one, and offered to her favourites.

As soon as Alice heard her sister's voice she turned quickly round and ran to meet her.

"Take care! Bless my heart! You will run up against the table!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore, catching hold of her, and letting the peas fall to the ground.

The pigeons, scared by this sudden movement, rose from the window-sill into the air with a rushing sound, and after wheeling round two or three times dropped one by one into their old places again.

Mrs. Thorne, who was reading a large black-letter Bible at the carved walnut-tree table, looked up. "Hollo! what's that little humbug about now?" she asked.

"She is always getting into mischief," said Captain Scudamore, as he shook hands with Maud. "She had quite an adventure yesterday."

"Yes; quite an adventure!" said Alice, laughing.

"What was it?" asked Maud.

"You know the pond in the field at the bottom of the garden?" said Captain Scudamore.

"Dear Alice—the pond!" cried Maud in terror.

"Yes," said Alice, putting aside Captain Scudamore with her little hand, and advancing eagerly to tell the story herself. "I heard Dick's voice in the field, and I went through the garden to meet him; but you know the descent to the pond is very gradual on the side nearest the house, and I missed my way, and got down among the osiers, and into the water. I was so frightened when I felt the wet; but I called to Dick, and he soon came to me."

"And a pretty couple of geese you looked!" said Mrs. Thorne "Dick as pale as a sheet, and you with your teeth chattering, and your clothes all drenched."

"I have had a railing put up round the pond," said Captain Scudamore; "I should have thought of it before."

"I don't see that," said Mrs. Thorne; "if the child had done as she was bid, and not gone beyond the garden, she would have run into no danger."

"Ah! but she never does as she is bid," said Captain Scudamore, smiling at her.

"Who has the old man got with him, Dick?" asked Mrs. Thorne, looking through the window.

She used this designation when speaking of her brother, to distinguish him from his son.

"Sir Frederic Manning," replied Captain Scudamore.

"Hem! he comes here after Alice," replied Mrs. Thorne.

"What nonsense!" said Captain Scudamore; "he comes here solely because he has nothing to do."

"Hollo! Queen Maud here?" exclaimed Mr. Scudamore, as he entered; "this is capital; this is just the thing; you will come back and dine with us. Oh, yes, you must! Sir Frederic, this is Miss Warrenne, my little girl's sister, you know."

Sir Frederic, after speaking to the others, stared very hard at Maud, and then said:

"You are extremely like your brother."

"Well, I believe I am," replied Maud; then turning to Mr. Scudamore, who was dropping some beautiful double violets one by one into Alice's hand, she said, "Save some for me, grandfather."

Mr. Scudamore held a few out to her, and as she approached to take them, he whispered, "Now's your time, Queen Maud—a handsome young baronet that any one would say was made on purpose for you—and the coast clear, too—not another pretty woman within twenty miles, except little Alice, and she's not to be had. I know you had him in your eye when you refused Dick!"

"In the first place, grandfather," said she, crimsoning with anger, "I did *not* refuse Dick; and in the next, let me remind you, this is very pretty conversation for Sunday morning!"

"Well, when do you go to Rome again?" asked Mrs. Thorne of Sir Frederic.

"Never, I hope," said Sir Frederic; "I have accomplished my errand there—and I never was so tired of a place in my life—I stayed there three months."

"And what did you go for, Sir Frederic?" asked Alice, simply.

"That's a stupid question, little one!" said Mrs. Thorne; "you don't suppose he will tell *you* what took him there."

"Yes, I will," returned Sir Frederic; "I went to have a statue made for me."

"And did it satisfy you?" asked Alice.

"Oh, yes—perfectly."

"There, that will do," said Mrs. Thorne, "don't ask him any more—he will only fib and fib—it is quite awful to hear him; let it be a statue if he likes—we don't believe him a bit the more for——"

"But, Mrs. Thorne, upon my honour, I went to have a statue executed under my directions!" exclaimed Sir Frederic, with great vehemence. "The sculptor lived in Rome, and I could not describe what I wanted by letter, I declare!"

"Ah! ah! that will do," interrupted Mrs. Thorne. "Lived in Rome, did he?—a great many people live in Rome, as I said to Frank Barton."

"But, Mrs. Thorne," persisted Sir Frederic, "I protest you may see it any day at my house."

"Yes—make me believe you trotted over to Rome to get a statue of Julius Cæsar—I suppose you galloped to Stuttgard on the same errand last autumn twelvemonth, to get a statue made of Mademoiselle Mohr?"

"Upon my word, Mrs. Thorne!" cried Sir Frederic, really growing angry.

"Hush! that's a good man; don't let us talk before all these young people of such matters," said Mrs. Thorne, her eyes twinkling with enjoyment. "I'll come and see your Julius Cæsar one of these days."

"Well, we are going to church, some of us," said Captain Scudamore.

"I don't care if I go with you," said Sir Frederic.

"Do," said Mr. Scudamore. "I say, Queen Maud," he added, "I'll see and make him give you his arm."

"And I won't take it, I warn you, grandfather!" said Maud.

"I suppose you are not going, you wicked old woman?" said Mr. Scudamore, addressing his sister.

"Not I! What should I do there?" exclaimed Mrs. Thorne, thumping the black-letter Bible with her fist. "*This* is my church! I don't believe a word old Ranger says. Tells you not to use your horses on Sunday, and rides home in his own carriage! There are your parsons! But he is a good-looking man, and the women are all on his side. Eh, Mrs. Maud?"

"I am sure I wish him all sorts of good," said Maud, laughing. "His best friends can't oftener wish him a stall in C—— Cathedral than I do!"

"A stall! A tombstone, you mean!" said Mrs. Thorne.

"No, indeed," said Maud; "I think he would make a beautiful Prebend."

"Dick takes Alice, of course," said Mr. Scudamore, glancing at Sir Frederic.

"Then the least you can do, grandfather, is to take care of *me*," said Maud, slipping her hand into Mr. Scudamore's arm and pressing her little prayer-book upon him.

"I tell you what, Queen Maud, there must be an end one day to this sort of thing, you know," said Mr. Scudamore, in a doleful tone. "It can't go on for ever—I am sure I do all I can for you—but you are so perverse!"

"Then how light your conscience must feel, dear grandfather," returned Maud, "and what a pleasant reflection that is on a Sunday morning!"

"A fine-looking man, with a fine estate, and as kind-hearted a fellow as ever lived," said Mr. Scudamore, as they passed out of the gate; Sir Frederic being a little in advance, with Captain Scudamore and Alice.

"Since he is just out of hearing, grandfather, I may remark that I think him a very ordinary-looking man; that I know his estate is mortgaged and embarrassed in a shameful manner; shameful because it is owing to his own extravagance, and I wonder at you for recommending to me a person who crowns all his virtues by the exemplary one of hard drinking!"

"Well; I don't say he is as good-looking as Dick, for example," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I should think not," retorted Maud. "Secondly——?"

"Well, secondly; I don't think a little extravagance a crying sin in a young man who, if he had a motive—that is a wife, Queen Maud—would very soon turn over a new leaf."

"Ah, so you think! Go on," said Maud.

"And as for his drinking, I don't believe a word of it; perhaps when he was a younger man he may have now and then taken a little too much. But *I* never saw him drunk, and I know his habits are sober, Queen Maud—and I speak of everybody as I find them!"

"What a profoundly wise plan that is," said Maud, "to judge of others, not as they are, but as they appear to you! There are some cases, Mr. Scudamore, in which it is wiser to believe what you hear than what you see."

"Well, I'll tell you, Queen Maud, why people say so much against him," continued Mr. Scudamore; "because he does not fawn upon them, and is, perhaps, a little blunt and eccentric in his conduct, and because all the old dowagers in the county can make nothing of him for their daughters!"

"Bravo, grandfather!" returned Maud. "And now perhaps you can tell me what the text was last Sunday morning?"

"And when will you come to see my new statue, Mrs. Scudamore?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Whenever Dick will take me," replied Alice.

"Oh, he is an idle man! He can bring you any day—say to-morrow?"

"Well, to-morrow—provided it will not hurt your statue for me to touch it, for that is my only way of seeing, you know."

"You shall do what you please with it! And when are we to have our famous cowslip gathering?"

"Oh, very soon! you are to come to us for that, you know."

"I shall not forget it. I have pledged myself to Mrs. Thorne for some time past."

"How soon, Dick, will they be fit to gather?" asked Alice.

"In a week or ten days; there is one just blown!"

"Get it for me, Dick."

Captain Scudamore stopped to gather the cowslip, and Mr. Scudamore and Maud joined them.

"Where is your brother now, Miss Warrenne?" asked Sir Frederic.

"At Damascus," said Maud; "he is making a collection of inlaid weapons."

"Rather an expensive taste," said Captain Scudamore.

"He has the *de quoi*," replied Maud, smiling to herself.

"I should like to know how," remarked Mr. Scudamore.

"You will know one day, grandfather," said Maud.

"And very soon, I am afraid," added Alice, who knew that Mrs. Digby was dangerously ill.

"Here's a mystery," said Mr. Scudamore; "I should like to get to the bottom of it!"

"How curious the grandfather is!" said Maud.

"And I would not even tell Dick!" said Alice.

"I should like to go to Damascus; it is singular that I have never been in Syria!" said Sir Frederic. "I might start next week. Let me see; the packets for Alexandria leave on the——"

"Now, can you not let Damascus alone, and sit down quietly at the Manor-house?" said Mr. Scudamore.

"What to do?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Why, at your time of life you ought to be married and settled!" said Mr. Scudamore.

"Married! *la belle avance!*" returned Sir Frederic. "I can't afford it!"

"If you marry an heiress," said Alice, thinking she had found a complete solution to the difficulty.

"I have declared against that, absolutely, Mrs. Scudamore," returned Sir Frederic.

"And what an inviting prospect for any one who has it in his power to travel," exclaimed Maud, "to be told to sit down *quietly* at the Manor-house!"

"Then in my place, Miss Warrenne," said Sir Frederic, "you would——"

"Look out for the next packet to Alexandria," replied Maud.

"What, before the cowslips are gathered?" asked Alice.

They all laughed.

"Come, come; we are going to church—be serious," said Maud.

"Yes, we will; but you should not persuade Sir Frederic," said Alice.

"No; you should not persuade Sir Frederic, you viper!" said Mr. Scudamore, in a low tone.

"I know, grandfather, you call me names when you are most pleased with me," said Maud, smilingly.

"And, seriously, I will not start before I have gathered the cowslips," said Sir Frederic.

"That is right," replied Alice.

They went into the church—Mr. Scudamore still shaking his head to himself at Maud's delinquencies. As there was no room for Sir Frederic in the Scudamores' pew, he went into the next seat. This looked odd, because he had a large pew of his own at the other side of the church, fitted up with red velvet hassocks and arm-chairs. But he had very seldom made use of it, because until he had become intimate with the Scudamores, his visits to church had been few and far between; and when he had accompanied them of late, he had

always taken the place in their pew which Maud occupied. Mrs. Stapylton, who entered at the head of her four daughters, looked maliciously at him, for she feared he was attaching himself to Alice—and she remarked to Albina (the one destined for Sir Frederic) that an attachment to a married woman was always unluckily more difficult to counteract than one for a single girl, and that she had great claims upon her daughter's gratitude for the exertions she intended to make in her behalf.

And when they stood up for the morning hymn, and Alice and Maud were joining reverently in the service, I am sorry to say that Mrs. Stapylton was gazing into the red velvet pew, and picturing to herself Albina throned in the right-hand arm-chair, and Sir Frederic in the left; and Mr. Scudamore's eyes travelled in the same direction, and then came back to Maud with a woeful expression, as if he felt quite sure that, however hard he might work in her behalf, she would obstinately counteract all his endeavours. It happened that the first lesson was from the beautiful book of Ruth; and Sir Frederic, after listening to a few words, rather impatiently rose, and leaning over to Captain Scudamore, whispered:

"I say, Scudamore, tell your wife that my statue is taken from that chapter."

"Your statue!" said Captain Scudamore.

"Ruth, gleaning," replied Sir Frederic; and then he sat down contentedly again.

"Oh! I thought it was Julius Cæsar," remarked Alice, when her husband had given her this piece of information, and then, forgetting the statue, she directed her attention to Mr. Ranger.

"How I wonder what he had to say to Captain Scudamore in the middle of the service!" said Mrs. Stapylton to her eldest daughter as they left the church.

"I would give the world to know, mamma!" returned Miss Albina; "it did look so very odd!"

Miss Emily, who was in love with a cornet of Dragoons, and Miss Sarah, who was trying for the curate at Forrel, and Miss Laura, who was a romp, and cared for nobody, quickened their steps the moment they heard this subject started.

"Make haste, for goodness sake, if you don't want to be bored to death!" exclaimed Miss Laura, who always spoke her mind. "Mamma has begun prosing about that everlasting Sir Frederic Manning."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"LOVE ALTERS NOT!"

THAT evening Mrs. Digby died. As Mr. Warrenne never mentioned any details respecting his patients in his family, Maud was left in profound ignorance of the facts connected with her last moments. She was, therefore, unable to tell such of the neighbours as inquired whether Mrs. Digby died fast or slow, or hard or soft. For it must not be inferred because the Warrennes' visiting list was circumscribed, that they therefore were not on speaking terms with any of their neighbours. The few families who lived near were very gracious in their manner whenever they met Maud, and used to ask quite affectionately after her family. They also pitied her very largely, whenever her name was mentioned. They pitied her for not having a carriage—for not being in society—for her sister having married before her—for never having been to school, and therefore, as they thought, received no education. They pitied her (on speculation) for being shy—for not knowing how to give a dinner-party—for not going to London, and for wearing straw bonnets; in fact, they pitied her situation in every point of view, and did everything but try to mend it.

Some people have such a quantity of pity to spare that they have some to bestow even on persons with whom they are not acquainted. This was the case to a remarkable extent with the hosier's wife, who happened to meet Maud on her way to the post-office with a letter for Leonard, and forthwith began to pity Mrs. Digby.

"So poor Mrs. Digby is dead at last!" said she, in a tone of extreme compassion, "after such a tedious illness! I did *so* pity her! So melancholy it seemed for her, poor thing, living all alone there at Forrel Court—so very lonely for an invalid."

Now, as Mrs. Digby was rather prouder than usual, and was not in the habit of associating with hosiers' wives, even when they kept a carriage as Mrs. Sharpe did, it need not be said that that lady had never been an eye-witness to the solitude of Forrel Court.

Maud, who was always singularly embarrassed by Mrs. Sharpe's manners, and never knew what to say to her, made some vague reply, accompanied by a gesture as if she wished to move on to the post-office.

"But, Miss Warrenne," said Mrs. Sharpe, detaining her, "I hope there was a physician called in; I do trust that poor dear lady had farther advice."

Maud was happy to relieve her disquietude by assuring her that Dr. —— (naming one of the first physicians of the day) had been in frequent attendance upon her during the last three months of her life.

She did not add that nothing but her father's urgent remonstrances would have induced Mrs. Digby to permit a physician to be called in.

"I am truly thankful to hear this! I am rejoiced, indeed, to know that Dr. —— was with her; it must be such a relief—such a satisfaction to her relatives, you know," said Mrs. Sharpe, with a manner that could not fail to be interpreted as meaning—"thank Heaven she was not left to the tender mercies of such an ignorant man as your father!"

"As Mrs. Digby had not relations, I believe you are the only person likely to be much rejoiced by the visits of Dr. ——," replied Maud, making another move.

There was one fortunate circumstance connected with Mrs. Sharpe's ill-breeding—she was wholly impervious to satire—she was equally incapable of taking a jest or feeling a reproof. Maud's retort, therefore, fell to the ground, and she rejoined with much cordiality:

"I suppose you don't happen to know, Miss Warrenne, who is likely to succeed to Mrs. Digby's property? A very fine property, poor thing!"

Maud had a mind to ask whether Mrs. Digby was to be pitied for going to heaven, but she restrained herself, and replied quietly that the will had not yet been opened. Then, disengaging herself from her companion, she succeeded at last in lodging her letter in the post-office. She could not restrain a smile as she thought how little Mrs. Sharpe had suspected the contents of her letter, which she had written that morning by her father's desire, to inform Leonard of Mrs. Digby's death, and to summon him immediately to England.

When Mrs. Digby's will was opened, it was found that she left her estate to Leonard Warrenne on condition that he assumed the name and arms of Digby with his own, and to Alice, in consideration of her blindness, she bequeathed ten thousand pounds.

Of course there was a great commotion in the neighbourhood. Some persons thought Mrs. Digby must have been deranged; others thought naturally enough that she had better have left her property to them. Mrs. Stapylton took the wisest part. She proclaimed to Maud, at the church door the very next Sunday, that she had always thought Mr. Leonard a very charming young man, and that she sincerely rejoiced at his good fortune. Perhaps it occurred to her that, by means of one of her four daughters, the property might at last be brought into her family. At any rate, her conduct was in better taste than that of Mrs. Sharpe, who cast on the Warrennes' pew, as she strode up the aisle, a look of such mingled disdain and anger that Maud had much ado to help laughing.

Mrs. Sharpe could not endure Mr. Warrenne, for he was too honest, too direct in all his ways, to suit her feelings; the only pleasure that she derived from Mrs. Digby's will was certainly a vivid one; it consisted in assuring all her neighbours that she was very sorry indeed to find that Mr. Warrenne had lowered himself so much, for it was easy to see how he had employed himself during his long

attendance upon Mrs. Digby, and it was only a surprise to her that there was nobody found to take up the matter, and make it the subject of a law-suit!

When in turn she said this to Mrs. Creswick, that lady merely replied:

"Mr. Warrenne is one of my great favourites, so, if you please, we will change the subject."

For Mrs. Creswick knew by experience that all attempts at conviction fail with that kind of woman; for as soon as you have distinctly proved the error of what they have advanced, instead of attempting to carry on the argument, they go back to the first statement, and repeat word for word the facts that you have just disproved to them.

Mr. Scudamore was very much pleased that Alice had a legacy—not, as he remarked, that it was wanted, but that it would enable the child to have some indulgences which she had hitherto gone without. She could have a low carriage, with a pair of ponies, which he had once heard her wish for: and he should build her a green-house, for she was as fond of flowers as her father. He also remarked at the same time that he was sorry Queen Maud had been left out, but that without doubt she was handsome enough to get married without a sixpence, if she would be a little less perverse.

Maud rejoiced, without the drawback of a single thought, in her sister's fortune; she might be jealous of the regard of those she liked, but it was out of her nature to be envious of money.

As Mrs. Digby's will had been made before Alice married, Captain Scudamore took care to secure the legacy to herself, a proceeding which Alice could not understand, and which she troubled herself little enough about, for her thoughts were all occupied by the approaching cowslip gathering.

At last the cowslips were ready. Mrs. Thorne had kept a watchful eye over them, for her cowslip wine was famous, and though nobody drank it at the Woodlands, yet she fancied that she saved a great deal of money by it.

Maud's presence on all these occasions was indispensable—not so much for the work she did, as for the spirit she threw into everything—the air of enjoyment she brought with her.

She was to breakfast at the Woodlands, and her father was to fetch her back in the evening.

It was a delightful morning; the sky one sapphire, and the young green trees swaying and shivering in the fresh breeze. They were early people at the Woodlands. Mr. Scudamore and his son were loitering in the garden when Maud arrived. On the other side of the hedge Mrs. Thorne, with her spade on her shoulder, might be seen in serious converse with Jack Robins.

Alice soon put her pretty head out of the casement window and called them all in to breakfast, which Mrs. Thorne dispensed with her usual oddity, and clothed in a costume that defies all description.

Now Mrs. Thorne was very stingy of her sugar; nothing she grudged so much as giving anybody an extra lump. It was a constant amusement to Captain Scudamore and Alice to tease her for more sugar. Sometimes they contrived to get the sugar-basin between them, and pillage it at their ease; and sometimes Alice would boldly take out a lump, and nibble it with her little white teeth; then Mrs. Thorne would threaten her with all kinds of disasters, and Mr. Scudamore would laugh, and take her part. After breakfast, while they were providing themselves with baskets, Sir Frederic Manning came in.

"What! You are here at last!" said Mrs. Thorne. "I thought all your fine words meant nothing; and that you were going to give me the slip."

"*You*, Mrs. Thorne! You could not think that, when you know how happy I always am in your society. Which of these baskets am I to have?"

While Mrs. Thorne was selecting a basket for Sir Frederic, Mr. Scudamore could not help giving Maud a few private instructions.

"Now, don't be foolish, Queen Maud," he said; "the man is a baronet. If you were half as pleasant to him as you are alone with us, you would very soon find yourself Lady Manning; be lively and amusing, and sing some of your pretty songs after dinner; and I don't see why one basket should not serve you both!"

Maud held up her basket with a laugh, which was the very smallest she could find, and would hold about a handful of cowslips. "I often regret, grandfather, that you had not a few daughters to dispose of," she said; "I am sure you would be indefatigable; and I think it possible you might succeed. But it is not my way, grandfather, so you had better let me alone."

Notwithstanding, Sir Frederic managed to walk beside her, as they all went to the cowslip field.

"I am sorry you did not come with your sister to see my Ruth," said Sir Frederic to Maud.

"What's that about his statue? Had he one after all?" cried Mrs. Thorne, who was walking stoutly along, with a large handbasket slung at the end of a spud, and carried over her shoulder as a woodman carries his faggot. "I would have gone with you had I known that."

"Oh! it is beautiful," said Alice, who was walking beside Maud, holding her hand like a child. "She is on one knee gleaning, and looking up; her head is turned round so gracefully; and she has some ears of corn in her dress; and Dick was delighted with it."

"Ah! then he told the truth for once," remarked Mrs. Thorne.

"I tell you what, Mrs. Thorne," said Sir Frederic, "if you minded what Mr. Ranger told you, you would not think so ill of your neighbours."

"Don't talk to me of Ranger!" exclaimed Mrs. Thorne, who when

she did not respect a person seldom prefixed the Mr. to his name—"he is the man for speaking ill of his neighbours. He tried to take away Jack Robins' character, and called him a Sabbath-breaker."

"And you know, aunt, he did shoot a blackbird one Sunday morning," said Captain Scudamore.

"And startled Mr. Ranger's horse, you know," said Alice.

"If he did, it was because he said he would," returned Mrs. Thorne; "the villain had been at his peas for days, and he said he would shoot him the very next time: and now set to work all of you, and gather. I am going off to hoe the turnips."

So saying, she slung down the large basket for the use of the society, and took her way across the meadow.

The cowslips scented the air deliciously; the wind blew pretty strongly, and rustled the ladies' dresses, and scattered Alice's long bright curls all about her face.

"Dick, my hair teases me," said Alice, who vainly tried to clear it away.

Captain Scudamore tried to put it up under her hat, but as he could not manage it, Maud took it in hand, and secured her ringlets behind her ears.

Alice, then sitting on the grass, gathered right and left all the cowslips within her reach. All her gestures were so childlike and innocent, and the style of her beauty so youthful, that no one could look at her without a sort of compassionate admiration.

"She is extremely pretty," said Sir Frederic to Maud; "you do not in the least resemble her."

"No," said Maud, smiling. "See, Dick, my basket is nearly full."

"Such a scandalous little basket!" said Captain Scudamore; and he emptied it suddenly into Alice's lap.

"You may fill it again!" said Maud, laughing; and she went to sit under the walnut tree, where Mr. Scudamore was composedly looking on.

"You are too tired," he said.

"Why, yes, grandfather," said Maud. "I am afraid my tastes are not very pastoral."

"They are not, Queen Maud—you are born to be a great lady—to live in a manor-house—and to have nothing to do but to order your servants—and now's your time."

"Thank you, grandfather; I am quite as well pleased to think that Leonard will have all this good luck—how he will enjoy the thick woods and the mossy paths at Forrel Court; and the books and the pictures—far more than if he had been born to expect them! We may look for him in three weeks, don't you think, grandfather? We wrote a fortnight ago—how soon do letters reach Smyrna?"

"Certainly, Queen Maud, there are very few women like you!" said Mr. Scudamore, admiringly.

Maud laughed.

"Look, grandfather; they are all following our example," she said; "they all seem to think that a pastoral life has its limits."

As there were three maid-servants and two farm boys hard at work gathering, the amateurs felt privileged to leave off when it pleased them. They came and sat round on the grass under the tree.

"It is growing warm," said Captain Scudamore; "Alice seems to have had enough of it."

"Oh! yes, the sun is so hot," said Alice, taking off her hat, and shaking down her beautiful ringlets.

"I say, Miss Warrenne," said Sir Frederic, "I believe I made a very stupid speech to you just now—it did not sound over civil at any rate—and the worst of it is, that if you try to explain away a blunder of that kind you only make it appear more serious."

"Oh! I know what you mean," said Maud, laughing; "but I assure you I took your speech literally, as it was intended."

"What's it all about?" asked Mr. Scudamore.

"A story of a curious old gentleman who always asked questions," replied Maud.

Sir Frederic burst out laughing. Mr. Scudamore shook his head, but laughed too.

"You are a termagant, Queen Maud, but it becomes you," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I should think that everything you did became you," added Sir Frederic.

"You owed me that," said Maud, with a laugh; "now you have paid your debts."

"Hollo! there's a carriage-and-four coming up the hill," said Captain Scudamore.

"A carriage?—so there is!—and four posters!" said Sir Frederic, raising himself up to look.

"Whose carriage, Dick?" asked Alice.

"I don't know. I can hardly see the carriage," said Captain Scudamore.

The knoll on which they were sitting overlooked the road, and as the carriage came slowly up the hill they could see the travellers.

"The Reynolds'!" exclaimed Maud. "Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds—look, grandfather!—and Florence Reynolds."

"*That* Florence Reynolds!" exclaimed Sir Frederic.

"What! don't you remember her?" said Mr. Scudamore, laughing.

"That sallow thing Florence Reynolds?" repeated Sir Frederic.

"Is she sallow? I'm so glad! She was such a disagreeable cross creature," said Alice.

They all laughed heartily.

"Though it is not exactly right to be glad, you know," said Maud; "but I agree with Alice she was very ill-natured."

"I should be sorry if she were ill; but she deserves to be sallow," repeated Alice.

"What a spiteful little thing it is!" said Mr. Scudamore, stroking her shining hair.

"Alice has not forgiven her for all the attention Dick used to pay her!" said Maud, with a merry burst of laughter.

"I! I pay her attention? I always disliked the woman! I believe I never spoke a dozen words to her!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore.

"I know; but I made her believe you did," replied Maud.

"What did you do that for?" said Captain Scudamore, taking Alice's hand.

"Why, to amuse myself. I had settled in my mind that Miss Reynolds should turn your head, and it is a mercy for you that she did not; I don't know how it happened; but I remember I was rather angry that you escaped."

"You don't know how it happened?" said Captain Scudamore, looking with a smile at Alice.

"That's his answer," said Mr. Scudamore.

"He could not have a better," said Sir Frederic.

"They will be neighbours of yours at Heathfield," remarked Mr. Scudamore.

"And of Leonard's too," said Alice.

"I wonder what Master Leonard will say to her marriage?" said Mr. Scudamore. "I always thought there was a kind of liking between him and the fair Florence."

"I don't believe it!" cried Maud.

"You do in your heart, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I think so too, from one or two things I have observed," said Captain Scudamore.

"You think wrong, both of you!" persisted Maud.

"Time will show," said Mr. Scudamore.

"But is she really going to marry Courtenay?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Why, that I can't say till I see her in the church," replied Mr. Scudamore; "but so it is reported."

"It is all settled," said Maud; "Mrs. Creswick told me of it."

"She will give him the slip yet," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I should think Reynolds the sort of fellow to keep her up to her traces," remarked Sir Frederic.

"Now is that the proper way to speak of a lady?" said Alice.

"Rather colloquial!" said Captain Scudamore, laughing.

"I believe I was in love with her for about a week myself," said Sir Frederic.

"In *love*, do you call it?" said Maud, disdainfully.

"On my word I was—or something like it. To be sure she was as different then as anything you can conceive—it is a great misfortune to a woman to lose her complexion."

"I know what Maud is thinking of," said Alice, in a low voice to

Captain Scudamore. "I know by her silence—those lines she is so fond of—

"'Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.'"

"She is quite right," said Captain Scudamore; "how does it end?"

"If this be error and upon me proved,
I never wrote, nor no man ever loved!"

"What lines are they quoting?" asked Sir Frederic, turning to Maud.

"Something about a woman losing her complexion!" replied Maud.

"I don't know what this Mr. Courtenay could be dreaming of to venture on marrying such a coquette," said Alice.

"A little occupation for him to look after her," said Mr. Scudamore. "But I don't know who we shall find for Queen Maud, since we cannot choose for her out of Fuller's Worthies."

"Be quiet, grandfather!" said Maud. "I wish you had five red-haired nieces to get off!"

"I should go to school to Mrs. Stapylton if I had," said Mr. Scudamore.

"Oh, now we are growing scandalous!" said Alice. "The grandfather always begins with Mrs. Stapylton when he sets in for a gossip."

"And here comes Mrs. Thorne to scold us for not gathering her cowslips," said Sir Frederic.

"I tell you what," said Mrs. Thorne, pausing and resting on her hoe; "if there does not come a little rain soon, I would not give much for your turnips. But I thought how it would be; it was very well I had somebody to do my work while you were idling and chattering here. I have a great mind not to give any of you a drop of my wine!"

"That would be a dreadful alternative," said Mr. Scudamore, laughing, and giving Maud his arm; "but as our idling has given us all an appetite, we will go in, with your leave, and see if we can get some luncheon."

"And, in default of cowslip wine, we will try and put up with a glass of claret," said Captain Scudamore.

"Ah, you will live to see the inside of the Fleet!" cried Mrs. Thorne, shaking her head. "But never mind!"

"Never mind," repeated Sir Frederic; "we shall learn to play tennis there, at any rate."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"THAT HORRID STEAMER!"

"I SAY, Lucy," whispered Edward, as the two children were seated in the window of the drawing-room at the Ferns, "I wish we had gone with Maud to-day to gather the cowslips."

"So do I," said Lucy; "Maud would have made us some cowslip tea."

"And Mrs. Thorne would have given us such a large piece of plum cake," said Edward.

"Yes, she always lets us eat as much as we like," added Lucy. "She says, 'There, you monkeys, make yourselves sick!'"

"Hasn't she a hook nose?" said Edward.

"And such an old straw bonnet," said Lucy, laughing.

"Harley says she is not a lady," said Edward.

"Isn't she?" returned Lucy, musing.

"Harley says no lady would wear such old clothes," remarked Edward.

"Then she is wrong," said Lucy. "Mrs. Creswick told us not to judge of people by their clothes."

"I say, I wish papa and mamma were not coming home to-day," said Edward.

"So do I," said Lucy; "I don't want to see the new baby!"

"Nor do I," said Edward; "I should like to break its head!"

"Hush!" said Lucy, glancing towards Mrs. Creswick.

"How many children has papa got now?" asked Edward.

"Four," replied Lucy; "there's Florence, and you and me, and the baby."

"Florence is not a child!" said Edward, looking puzzled.

"No; but she belongs to papa," returned Lucy.

Edward nodded his conviction to this remark.

"I think I hear the sound of wheels," said Mrs. Creswick; "can little Lucy see anything coming?"

"It is papa's carriage," said Lucy, getting down from the window-seat.

"Let us go into the portico and meet them," said Mrs. Creswick.

As soon as the first bustle of the arrival was over, the children, pleased at being kissed and caressed, and hearing a good deal of some pretty toys that mamma had got for them in the carriage, forgot their disappointment about the cowslips, and were prepared to look with a favourable eye on the baby, who, with his two nurses, had followed in a post-chaise.

Edward grasped it so tightly when he went to kiss it that he made it squall. Lucy admired its embroidered robe, and touched its little hands with more timid fingers.

"There, my darling loves, go all of you upstairs," said Mrs.

Reynolds; "and I hope you will be very kind to baby, and love him very much."

"And now, my dear Florence, let me look at you," said Mrs. Creswick. "I am very glad we have got you back in England again, for it is clear to me that the Continent has not agreed with you at all."

Florence lifted up her eyes to her aunt, and smiled, but very sadly.

"We have all great reason to rejoice at finding ourselves again in England," said Mr. Reynolds. "I hope we shall none of us forget the privileges we enjoy as British subjects. I consider that it is a crime to expatriate oneself for any length of time, and those who reside abroad should forfeit the protection of every government, and be treated as outlaws. Such are my views."

"Which is my room, Aunt Creswick?" said Florence. "Perhaps you will allow me to go up to rest until dinner."

"One moment, my dear," said Mrs. Creswick, laying her hand on her niece's arm. "I see Mr. Courtenay coming across the lawn with the Colonel."

Florence turned paler than before at his name. Mr. Reynolds seemed exceedingly gratified.

"Really, this is a mark of attention—I did not at all expect to find him here on our arrival. Florence, did you understand that Mr. Courtenay was at the Ferns?"

Mr. Courtenay's entrance protected Florence from the task of replying. She rather wondered how her father expected the coldest courtship to be carried on, since he appeared so much overcome by every trifling mark of politeness that she received.

There was, however, no particular eagerness in his greeting. He spoke to those nearest to him first, and then advancing to Florence, and taking her hand slightly, he hoped she was not much fatigued by her journey, remarked that the weather was extremely warm, and then fell back to Mrs. Reynolds' chair, and began laughing with her about her passage from Hâvre.

"I thought of you on Tuesday," he said. "You must have had a rough night of it."

"Oh, don't remind me of my troubles!" said Mrs. Reynolds. "I expected to die; I told Mr. Reynolds so—I never suffered more!"

"Will you never make a good sailor?" said Mr. Courtenay; "you who have been twice round the Cape!"

"I know; and each time barely escaped with my life. But this shall be the last, I am determined. Oh, we were such a party! Both nurses ill, and poor Mr. Reynolds half dead with headache!"

"And what became of the baby?" asked Courtenay.

"Florence took compassion on him, poor little fellow," said Mrs. Reynolds. "She nursed him so carefully; I did not know you were so good a nurse before, dear Florence."

"Are you fond of the sea, Miss Reynolds?" asked Courtenay.

"Far from it," replied Florence; "but I believe I suffered less than any one on board, and therefore I was able to be of some use."

"Well, now, tell us the news of the neighbourhood," said Mrs. Reynolds; "who are our nearest neighbours at Heathfield?"

"Your nearest neighbour is Mr. Leonard Warrenne, who has just inherited Forrel Court of the late Mrs. Digby," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Mrs. Digby dead!" exclaimed Mr. Reynolds.

"And Leonard Warrenne her heir!" said Courtenay. "How is that?"

Florence turned deadly white.

"Was he related to her?" asked Mrs. Reynolds.

"Is he in England?" asked Courtenay.

"Is not he very handsome?" said Mrs. Reynolds.

"What was her motive for such a bequest?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"Mr. Leonard Warrenne (whom you must now, if you please, call Mr. Warrenne Digby) is not related to the late Mrs. Digby, to whom I understand he afforded some service during a storm," replied Mrs. Creswick; "he has not yet arrived in England, but I believe is expected daily. He is considered remarkably handsome, I believe, my dear Mrs. Reynolds, or, at all events, he *will* be, when he is known to be in possession of an estate of eight thousand a year."

"I hope he won't make ducks and drakes of it," said Colonel Creswick. "When a man comes into a fortune he did not expect, it is a great temptation."

"Rely upon it he won't be spoiled," said Mrs. Creswick. "I think that this time next year all those who are now present will agree with me in saying that Leonard Warrenne has not been spoiled by prosperity."

"I agree with you beforehand, Mrs. Creswick," said Mr. Courtenay; "he is one of the few persons who deserve wealth, for he has a refinement about him that would ensure its being spent gracefully. I am heartily glad of it. This accounts for some of his vagaries; no doubt Mrs. Digby sent him abroad. She must have been an excellent woman—a woman of discrimination. She has transmitted her estate to a gentleman."

"I am glad to hear that you think so highly of our future neighbour," said Mr. Reynolds; "I trust we may become intimate with him."

"He is a very nice young fellow," said Colonel Creswick; "we must look about for him, and find him a wife."

"I think we will let him do that for himself," returned Mrs. Creswick.

"You are quite right, dearest madam," replied the Colonel, bowing; "every one should follow his own taste in a selection of such importance."

"I can tell you I shall not let him alone so easily," said Mrs. Reynolds, laughing. "I have thought of twenty people for him already. How glad Lucy Harding would be to catch him, or any one of the five Pattersons!"

"He must not marry just yet, thank you," said Courtenay, smiling, and bending down to Mrs. Reynolds; "I shall want him for my groomsman."

"Oh, fie, you naughty man! I hope Florence did not hear you," said Mrs. Reynolds, laughing.

"Why not?" said Courtenay, coolly; "*she* is in the secret, at any rate."

Florence had fallen back in her chair, faint and bewildered; she would gladly have left the room, but she dared not make the attempt unaided. The news she had just heard perfectly unnerved her. She trembled so much that she feared it would be perceived; tears would have relieved her, but how could she dare to weep in the presence of her father, who had betrothed her, and the man to whom she was betrothed? Her tears would be an insult to them, if their source could have been suspected; and she could imagine with what bitter irony her father would visit upon her the sin of crying for nothing.

"Pray, Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, coming round and leaning on the back of her chair, "was not this Leonard Warrenne that we are all taking about one of your victims?"

Florence coloured painfully, but made no reply.

"He does you great credit," pursued Courtenay, "or did. I don't know whether he has had his heart mended out in Syria, but I assure you he used to wear the willow to a very great extent, and I know you ladies don't like half measures on that subject."

"Oh, Mr. Courtenay!" said Florence.

The distress in her voice was too visible to be mistaken.

"I see," he said to himself. "I should not wonder if she was sorry for it." Then he added aloud, "You are tired to death; you are not a good traveller, Miss Reynolds; you had better put yourself under Mrs. Creswick's care."

Mrs. Creswick came up to her. She was hardly able to stand without assistance, and they went upstairs together to her room.

"My dear," said Mrs. Creswick, sitting down beside her, "your father has ensured your future welfare by this engagement; he has secured for you a husband whom you will be able to esteem and respect. You would not have chosen so wisely for yourself."

"No doubt Mr. Courtenay is very much to be respected, aunt," said Florence, in a dejected tone, "and I have no chance or hope of escaping this marriage," she added.

"And one day, my dear, when the duties of life appear to you of more importance than its pleasures," said Mrs. Creswick, "you will confess to yourself that your father has acted the part of a true friend in thus deciding for you."

Florence saw in an instant that she had nothing to expect from the intervention of her aunt. She was not in the habit of relieving her feelings by complaining. She dropped the subject.

"I feel really ill, aunt," she said; "papa is apt to think that I give way to every little feeling of languor; but you know that has never been one among my many faults. If you will go down and excuse my appearing again to-day, I shall be so much obliged to you."

Mrs. Creswick readily charged herself with this errand, and re-appeared in the drawing-room to announce that Florence was suffering so much from headache that she had advised her to go at once to bed.

Mr. Reynolds remarked that the prevalence of headache among young ladies of the present day was singular, and he thought should be checked.

Mrs. Reynolds declared it was that horrid steamer, and regretted she had allowed Florence to fatigue herself with the baby, though, she remarked, there was no help for it at the time, for every one else was ill besides themselves.

Mr. Courtenay was sitting apart, looking over the *Quarterly Review*. He went on reading.

"Mr. Courtenay," said Mrs. Creswick, stopping as she passed to her own chair, "you must not think me very romantic, or very curious; but I should like very much to know whether my niece ever gave you any decided marks of preference."

"Not the slightest, I give you my word," said Mr. Courtenay, looking up calmly from his book. "This is a very excellent article on Church Preferment."

(*To be continued.*)

FRIENDSHIP.

FRIENDSHIP is put by an old writer above love itself. In the latter he holds (here agreeing with Montaigne) that there is some sense of pursuit—an endless restless preoccupancy vaguely followed by fear of satiety.

Friendship is the loftiest of human relationships. Perfectly voluntary, it is often the most binding and the most permanent. Love, at its highest, grows into friendship. If it does not, love has failed of its fullest fruition. Unfortunate marriages are mostly owing to one form or another of this defect. Affinities of blood are weak compared with the purely spiritual affinities of friendship. Here lies the significancy of the oft-quoted French proverb, "Un bon ami vaut mieux qu'un parent."

Sometimes the choice seems to be determined by a certain subtle law of unlikeness; but unlikeness is only efficient when it affords room for the free play of mutual sympathy, admiration, or reverence. Lord Tennyson, in 'In Memoriam,' has this in his view (though the beauty and greatness of his friend Henry Hallam was no doubt magnified somewhat seen through the mists of absence and death). The idea is repeated in many forms, in fact—it presents the most substantial of the recurrent ideas in Lord Tennyson's works—the affection for Henry Hallam colouring even his conception of King Arthur, and projecting itself into the more powerful of his latest works: an idea which was ingeniously, but not exhaustively, worked out by that clever essayist, Matthew Browne, in his volume, 'Views and Opinions.'

The 'In Memoriam' is the loftiest poetic celebration of friendship in its ideal form—the friendship into which all love must grow; indeed it is noticeable that the Laureate constantly slips into comparison of his friendship with love and true marriage.

Montaigne, a very different type of man, in his essays celebrates a friendship true and tried and lofty, which comes in as a softening accompaniment even when he is dealing with matters that to a Frenchman usually permit little inflow of sentiment. In his essay on "Friendship" he likens love to the hunters, who follow the hare, but when they have caught her, despise her, being only pleased at pursuing that which flies. "Friendship, on the contrary," he goes on, "is enjoyed in proportion as it is desired; and it grows up, thrives and increases by enjoyment, as being itself spiritual; and the soul is refined by the practice of it."

All the loftier spirits of the world have magnified friendship. Indeed with the Greeks and Romans friendships stood definitely on the higher form of love of which they had little knowledge, and some (Winckelmann, the German art critic, among them) are prone to say

that love in its more passionate devotions is incompatible with the loftier form of friendship. No doubt, in actual life and in certain circumstances and complications, love and marriage militate against friendships; but taken broadly, we should be inclined to hold that a true love should only educate for the higher friendship in its training for self-denial, its admiration for dissimilar traits from those possessed, and above all, in its intensifying and quickening all the powers of sympathy.

And this effect will be accomplished by love passing into friendship of the highest order first on the wedded pair themselves. Miss Nesbit, one of our most truthful and accomplished young lyric poets, has this verse, beautifully illustrating this theme:

"We loved, my love, and now it seems
Our love has brought to birth
Friendship, the fairest child of dreams,
The rarest gift of earth.

"Soon die love's roses, fresh and frail,
And when their bloom is o'er,
Not all our heart-wrung tears avail
To give them life once more.

"But when true love with friendship lives,
As now, for thee and me,
Love brings the roses,—Friendship gives
Them immortality."

In the 'Guesses at Truth,' by Augustus and Charles Hare, we have this apt sentence: "Friendship is love, without either flowers or veil." Goethe, whatever defects he may have had, was calculated to be a true friend; and he has written beautifully in praise of friendship. At one place, he says:

"Wer nicht die Welt in seinen Freunden sicht,
Verdient nicht dass die Welt von ihm erfahre."

Actually making a man's desert of fame to depend on his powers of friendship.

A very wise and observant man has said, "One must go out into the world to find his true counterpart, a familiar friend; it is little likely he will find it among his own relations; or if he do, there is a risk that it will be associated with narrowing influences which are not wholly compensated by its intensity of partiality. Dr. South devotes one of his most eloquent sermons to friendship, and in it he says:

"Friendship consists properly in mutual offices, and a generous strife in alternate acts of kindness. But he who does a kindness to an ungrateful person, sets his seal to a flint, and sows his seed upon the sand. Upon the former he makes no impression, and from the latter he finds no production."

Addison, in his quietly practical and polished manner, has written well in praise of friendship. He avers that friendship is a strong and habitual inclination in two persons to promote the good and happiness of each other. "False friendship," says the learned Robert

Burton, "is like the ivy, decays and ruins the wall it embraces; but true friendship gives new life and animation to the object it supports." In 'Guesses at Truth' we have these very incisive and suggestive remarks: "We never know the true value of friends till they die. While they live we are too sensitive of their faults: when we have lost them, we only see their virtues. Friendship closes its eyes rather than see the moon eclipsed, while malice denies that it ever was at the full."

The books of Herder, the great German poet, abound in tributes to friendship; this is perhaps one of the most discriminating:

"The friend who holds up before me the mirror, conceals not my smallest faults, warns me kindly, reproves me affectionately when I have not performed my duty; he is my friend, however little he may appear so. Again, if a man flatteringly praises and lauds me, never reproves me, overlooks my faults and forgives them before I have repented, he is my enemy, however much he may appear my friend."

Calderon, the Spanish poet, meets us with the same teaching. "Wise friends," he writes, "are the best book of life, because they teach with voice and looks." Another says, "The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust." And indeed it is true that friendship is the foe of flattery. No friendship is worth the name unless it aims at doing the highest good, assisting to escape from the manifest forms of selfishness, and to look at duty with fresh impulse. The delights of friendship are so select and inspiring that they cannot be described. We must quote Montaigne in support of this. He says:

"As friendship in its highest phases is a constant effort to look through the eyes of another, it affords the finest education in sympathy. By it man is first prepared to do his duty in society in abnegating the individual desire and impulse. It is a training-school for the loftiest virtues. Hence the saying of Rabbi Hillel has a deeper and wider meaning than appears on the surface: 'Judge not thy friend till thou standest in his place.' Like port, friends grow sweeter as they grow older, and have gone long ocean journeys. This is a noble verse to friendship, but not nobler than it deserves in its ministry of vicarious effort and suffering, and devotion:

> "Me, too, thy nobleness has taught
> To master my despair;
> The fountains of my hidden life
> Are through thy friendship fair."

In full, the final and the most beautiful aspect of friendship is to find it as Coleridge did, "a sheltering tree." How rare, how delightful, with what fine suggestions and impulses fruitful, the sight of two old men whose friendship has survived separation for half a lifetime, and who transmit, as if by a finer kind of tradition, the gift to their children and children's children. These are the golden threads that shine in the warp of the world's web, and make ordinary life a poem.

A. H. Japp, LL.D.

WHERE THE PLANE-TREES GROW.

"Now, therefore, I say, Love; love truly and long—even for ever. And if you can do other things well, do them: but if not, at least learn to do that, for it is a very gentle thing and sweet in the learning."

EARLY in the morning the sunlight strikes across an open space where tennis-courts, a wide, broad road, and a long green garden, with an asphalte path running round it, give the opening somewhat the appearance of a square. On sunny mornings, the leaves of the plane-trees bordering the long garden, which belongs to an institution for the blind, take on a sharp, glittering light, and rustle tunefully in the passing breeze. Towards seven o'clock the watering-carts pass down the road, which then shines and gleams like a track of silver, and reflects the waving planes as the surface of a lake might do. The houses round the space are large and imposing, and mostly of warm red brick, and the roofs are tiled, so that, on bright mornings, looking out on to it all, one receives an impression that has something of a foreign element in it—what with the rich colouring, green leaves, sharp sunlight, shining roads, dappled skies, and the flower and fruit-laden carts rolling homewards from the great market in the city's heart.

On one side of the tennis-courts is the south wall of a handsome red-bricked Conservatoire of Music. There are no windows in this wall, because the organ is built against its entire breadth. Sometimes, quite early in the morning, when one has time to lie and listen and to think, a grand rush of music swells across the sunlit space, and strikes the air with a pleasantness and peace, echoes of which linger round about one throughout the intervals of the hurrying, hard-pressed day.

High up, at the top of the building, a little, yellow-curtained window looks out over the tennis-courts, the wide road, and the garden of the blind. This was once the window of the resident secretary, a girl called Angela Hardinge. Across the space, at the farthest end of the line of houses, and almost at right angles with the yellow-curtained window, was another window, statelier, taller, larger-paned, belonging to the study of one Dick Clayton, a rising young journalist, who hoped, by steady effort, to run his journalism into the broader, airier ways of authorship pure and plain.

Dick Clayton had once known Angela Hardinge well as the petted, only daughter of a luxurious, well-appointed home. He had heard of the terrible blow that had befallen her, leaving her, almost on the same day, fatherless, and penniless too, except for her own little personal treasures. He had also heard of the quiet, brave way in which she put on battle armour, and showed an earnest front to the

grim world that faced her; and, at time of hearing, he had conceived a great admiration for her. Then other interests had cropped up, and she had slipped more or less from his recollection. Life is short, and the demands that are made on a man's memory quite excusably great of course.

Rather more than a year since they had met, there was, one evening, at the above-mentioned Conservatoire, a great reception, to which Clayton, as one of the artistically-elect of the neighbourhood, had been bidden. It was an intensely hot night in July, and he and a friend had climbed for coolness and a cigar to the top of the building. In a desultory, aimless fashion they wandered from one deserted music-room to another, chatting as they went. Presently they came to a door lower than any of the others. The friend suggested that it led to the roof perhaps, and Clayton turned the handle.

They stood on the threshold of a small and dainty room, whose aspect was about as unlike that of the dreary music-rooms around as two things of the same kind can possibly be. One of the low walls was hung with a broad piece of tapestry embroidered in gold and palest pink. On the edge of the dado, which was in black wood, were little pictures, medallions, some exquisite pieces of majolica and other relics of a former state. Behind a soft, wide chair was a tall, enamelled screen, and on its shelves were charming photographs and sketches in pen and ink. The floor was stained to match the dado, and a Persian rug of rich, warm tints was laid across it. On a little table by the big chair there was a white china bowl filled with roses. Their sweet, faint scent swept through the room. Books were everywhere.

As the two men stood, vaguely, wonderingly taking in these details, a curtained door inside the room, which led into another even smaller room beyond, was opened, and a rather tall, slight woman's figure stepped forward. She wore a simple black gown, but at the neck was a large, turned-down collar of soft white cambric which somehow became her infinitely. Her hair was parted in the middle, loosely waved, and gathered together in a knot. The light from a shaded lamp falling on it, touched it with a sort of tender glory. Her face was quite girlish-looking, yet thought and work, sorrow and solitude, had stamped it with a rare sweetness.

A genuine surprise and pleasure spread over Clayton's face. In an instant he had recognised her. From the shadow of the little doorway he walked a step into the room.

"Miss—Miss Hardinge! A thousand apologies for intruding on you like this. But now, having found you, say that I may come in, won't you?"

He spoke with the pleasant assurance of the man who knows he is always welcome. A wave of flame shot up into Angela Hardinge's face, and in her voice was that nervous little quiver which is often born of a great delight.

"Oh, please do. I am so glad," she answered, simply.

Then Clayton turned to introduce his friend, but the friend had quietly disappeared. He had some intention of borrowing a ten-pound note from Clayton on the morrow, and was wise in his generation accordingly.

When the other two thus found themselves left all alone in that far-off dainty little room against the roof, they both laughed a laugh which drew them dangerously near each other—figuratively speaking, of course.

"Who would have thought it?" said Dick, in utter and supreme content.

"Who, indeed?" smiled Angela, too happy to regret that she could think of nothing more brilliant in the way of a rejoinder.

Then she made Dick sit down in the big soft chair, while she got a little wicker one for herself, and drew it in front of the table where the roses were. They talked of very many things. Angela told him all the details of her busy simple life, and he told her not a few of his. She told him how, except for her daily walk, she rarely left those two high, lonely rooms—the little writing-room in which they were, and the smaller sleeping one beyond; how, before the masters and the pupils came, she used to go and practise on the great organ in the concert-room; how all day she was at her letters and secretarial work; how towards the twilight-time she used to take her walk, speeding up the long avenue to the cool broad spaces of the Heath, there watching the sun go down beyond Harrow spire, and even, on very clear days, getting a glimpse in the opposite direction of the great grey dome and gilded cross of far St. Paul's; how at nights she read and wrote for her own delight.

Then they wondered how they had come to lose sight of each other for so long. Dick reproached Angela for not having let him hear of her and her way of life. Angela answered that you cannot quite go up and down the world pouring out your news to people who do not show any particular desire to become acquainted with it. Dick considered that this was positively adding insult to injury. To think of the hopeless inquiries he had made, of the vain hours he had spent in trying to ascertain the whereabouts of his former little friend. Only to think!

Whereupon Angela smiled again. She knew Dick Clayton very fairly well. And yet—and yet—she felt all the old lost gaiety of heart surging back into her life once more.

"Women are such poor fools," she argued with herself; yet felt it was worth while being a poor fool, if only for the happiness of being a woman too.

So they sat talking of the past and present. Before they parted they touched the future.

"By the way," said Dick, suddenly starting up, and making for the yellow-curtained window, which was thrown wide open, "it is exactly

as I thought. Do come here a moment, Miss Hardinge, will you?"

Angela went to him and stood by his side, looking out. There was a bright, clear full moon, and the broad road and the wide green spaces between the houses were flooded in the soft silver light. The leaves of the plane-trees shone and twinkled like so many thousand tiny polished shields.

"How beautiful!" said Angela, breathlessly.

But that was not quite what Dick had meant.

"Do you see," he asked, "right over there, in a direct line from that telephone-pole, and just beyond the Blind School kitchen garden —do you see the corner house? Well, my rooms are there. I moved into them about a month ago. Now wasn't it a providential arrangement?"

Then Angela laughed merrily.

"Why providential?" she inquired.

"Why," he answered, "do you really need to ask? All day long, while you are working here, I am working there. My window faces yours. And before dinner, you know, I, too, have a way of strolling up the hill. . . I should like to think that we might sometimes— stroll up together."

After he had gone, Angela went to the little table where the bowls and pots of roses were. In a tiny silver frame there was a photograph of him, which he had once given her. She should have placed it at random amongst the others on the shelves; but just as he had a place of his own in her life, so he must have a place of his own in her room. She had drawn her chair so as to cover the little frame as much as possible, but her cheeks took on a sudden scarlet hue as she wondered whether he had noticed it all the same.

As a matter of fact he had; but she need not have troubled, for he thought none the less of her on that account.

Thus it came to pass that they saw each other constantly, and, in the fulness of time, became something more to one another than even the best of friends.

For it chanced that one calm golden day in the late autumn they walked far and long by the high beautiful road that runs eastwards in a fine and stately line from Hampstead Heath, and lies, as it were, between two worlds—the great world of London on the south, and the mysterious green country towards the north. They had some tea at the charming and classical little tea-garden belonging to that quaint old hostelry, 'The Spaniards,' and were happy and gay exceedingly, these simple forms of entertainment being the joy of Angela's heart. They were quite alone, for it was late in the season. After tea, when Angela was rested, they strolled out in the direction of the fields. A deep clear yellow glow shone in the western sky; the distant horizon

was veiled in mist; fragments of song were borne across the land; it was a very tender, quiet scene.

Amidst it all, Dick asked his dearest girl if she would marry him. And very beautifully and bravely she answered him according to his heart's desire.

After that, their days flowed on very gently and delightfully, and they managed to be often together. Dick would come round to Angela in her dainty room which breathed a repose and charm not too often found in any room; and he would read her strong and exquisite things; and they would talk concerning them, for they were not afraid to be grave together. Sometimes he would bring her to his own rooms and entertain her with a great delight; but this only happened once or twice, for he was very careful of her.

They continually discussed their future. They were both quite poor, and, as Dick said, two poverties, even when joined together, will not make one richness—as the world counts richness. Not that they would have minded being poor together, but in marriage there are many and strange things to think of. However, they were pleased to arrange theirs for the Christmas Eve of the following year; Christmas Eve being Angela's birthday. They even had the audacity to discuss their wedding journey. He was to take her down to a certain storied old-world spot on the edge of the eastern sea, and there, amongst the legends and the loneliness, they two, for a little space, would dwell and walk together.

In the meantime Dick was to work very hard at the development of a certain inspiration which had occurred to him in the watches of the night—a glorious work, which Angela, who knew of it alone of humankind, had much at heart. To her, the world grew a dear and pleasant abiding-place. In it were great thoughts and hopes and efforts; much work, much strife and storm perhaps; but one man, one heart-love only.

So the weeks went by, until at last the work was finished, and launched on to the treacherous sea of public approval; and the winds and tides being greatly in its favour, it breasted the waves of criticism and jealousy, and came back into port with colours flying. That is to say, one smiling April morning Dick awoke to find himself famous—his name was on the lips of the whole literary world.

His success had come to him smoothly. He had not been forced to fight for it, and spend his strength in weary years of pot-boiling labour before attaining it. They placed a little laurel wreath of fame about his brows ere he reached his thirtieth year; it was a series of bold sketches on the right subject at the right moment that did it. They were wonderful in detail, exquisitely artistic in treatment and conception; one of the more penetrating of the critics thought to see in them strong and sincere evidence of a gentle feminine influence. Then people began to inquire about him. The most influential

publications of the day invited him to contribute to their columns. Great managers and leading actors solicited him to write plays for them. Advertising companies offered him fabulous sums to boom their speciality, even in the bye-ways of his work. When he told Angela of this last, she answered, with a charming little show of anger, that really degradation could go no further; while all the time her heart was overflowing with gratitude to these dear people, who showed their great good sense in that it was her dearest one whom they delighted so to honour!

Rarely, however, does a man come from such a record unspotted, untrammelled, void of the great offence of thinking himself a genius. Alas, alas for Angela, Dick did not!

With all his culture, and undoubtedly high order of brain power, he was a past-master in thorough knowledge of the thousand indescribable ways which fascinate women so particularly. Society began to claim him as one of its petted darlings. Few fashionable gatherings were considered quite complete without the presence of the young lion of the hour. The grave and tender little evenings when he read to Angela, or brought his work to do by her side, and trusted to the rare and beautiful instinct of appreciation which was so especially hers, to know where he was doing best or worst—those evenings were known of her no more.

It was very sad and very incomprehensible; but then so are many things of life.

She bore it loyally. When he flew up the wide stone stairs that led to her little rooms, to give her the hurried embrace, which was all he could spare her from the world just then, she said, as she heard his feet speeding from her again, that her love must never make her narrow and exacting; that all those people amongst whom he moved must be the better and the richer for his presence; that a great man belongs, by virtue of his greatness, to all who stand in need of him. But her eyes were often dim with longing. As for him, when sometimes at a late hour he passed to his rooms down the wide road that led beneath her window, he would look up and see the lamp burning, and know that she was waiting there. But he could not go to her—could not, for very shame of the thoughts that had assailed him.

For in the great social world where they claimed him, the world where people marry and are given in marriage day by day, there, nevertheless, was widely spreading the influence of a pseudo-philosophical set, who held that marriage was the death of genius, the tomb of romance, indeed the tomb of most things that go to make life worth living. And some of the poverty of this kind of thinking had entered into Dick, and taken from his manliness. Until there happened the pitiful little tragedy which perhaps is best told very briefly.

There was in society that season, an Austrian woman of beauty, birth, learning, and a great individual charm, and between Dick and

this woman there sprang up a strong and sudden feeling, for which friendship somehow seems too noble and true a word. In the autumn she bade him come to her for a long stay at her country house in Hungary. There was to be hunting, shooting, fishing, society, all of the best—amongst the latter the great Russian novelist, whose name is proverbial. And Dick went.

No one perhaps will ever know exactly how or why it all chanced to come about. But one day a letter was brought to Angela as she sat at her work, and when she had finished reading it a great blackness and blindness came over her and it seemed as though the light of her life went out. For long hours she sat there, motionless, stupefied, her head resting on her hand. When the afternoon was far spent she went over to the window, but a great thick, cold, mist had arisen and she could not see that other window far across the space. In the agony of the night, she remembered, that in that awful little letter, he had implored her to send him one word of mercy, of forgiveness for having left her, for having injured and laid her life so low. She got up, and took sheet on sheet of paper, but could accomplish nothing. Her hand had never penned him aught but words through which there breathed the tenderest love—it could not do it now. She thought the whole thing out, and in the cold, grey morning she went to the post-office, and wired to him across the continent—three little words alone:

"Dear, I understand."

Once Angela had heard a story of a captain whose ship had struck a rock one night in a wild and passionate storm. When he saw that life was practically over, he went to his cabin and returned swiftly in full uniform, his medals pinned to his breast, his sword unsheathed and in his hand. And thus, proudly, bravely, he met his death.

The idea came to her that Dick, if he ever thought of her—and she was sure he did—would be best pleased if he knew that she was meeting, not her death, but what is sometimes even harder, her death-in-life, in like manner to the captain of that story.

There slowly came a transfigured look in her eyes, which were growing large and bright with pain; and in her voice there was often a far-away sound which told that her joy was not in the things of this present; otherwise there was little change. She was brave, and gay, and smiling, and well-beloved by the few who knew her. But her sorrow was known to none. She might have said, as one has sung:

> "I have a room where into no one enters,
> Save I myself alone:
> There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
> There my life centres."

It had been the wish of both of them to keep their engagement from the world—a sweet and sacred time for themselves alone; so she was spared the pity of her friends, in this her hour of tribulation. Had

she read the papers, she might have noticed in certain of the early November copies a little paragraph setting forth "with deep regret" the news that that brilliant young author of promise and performance, Dick Clayton, had been wounded in a duel fought in Hungary; that, as a result, he had entirely lost the sight of one eye, while that of the other was gravely feared for. But when at nights, wearied with the long day's work, she found a little hour for reading, it was in the books that Dick himself had given her that she sought her solace and sustainment, while the thousand small events of the day passed unheeded and unread by her.

One bright cold afternoon just before Christmas, as she was returning from her daily walk, she saw coming towards her, up the hill, a large motherly form which she soon recognised to be that of Dick's old landlady. It seemed a strangely joyful thing to her that she might speak a passing word to one whom Dick had spoken to; and, almost before she knew it, her hands were in the big kind clasp of the good woman who had been the bearer of so many messages between herself and him in the bygone days.

Then she heard, how only a week or so before, they had brought her dearest one back all blind, and weak, and pain-struck: how he lay with his sightless eyes turned ever to where her window was, across the space; how he could not write and would have none to read to him, but just lay there in loneliness and darkness until the day was done.

"He do stand, miss, in sore need o' you, he do, though whether I'm a-sayin' it as shouldn't, I don't know: but I reckon, miss, I do, that he's a-standin' in sore need o' you."

Then Angela's heart was smitten with a torture it had never known before—since of his own free will and word he had put her from his life for ever. But when she got back to her room, all the evening, all the night, and all the day that followed, she could do nothing but say to herself: "Dick is there—in pain and blindness—and in sore need of me."

She noticed the poor blind people taking their exercise up and down the long walled-in garden across the road. A terrible desolation struck her at a thought—what if Dick, her dearest one, should come to that—to that? There was a poor old man whom Angela from her window often watched. He kept aloof from his afflicted brothers. In the summer he worked at baskets and wicker-chairs in the sunshine: in the winter he paced the walks with sad and heavy steps. They told her he had once been famous. Oh, Dick! Oh, Dick

The great Conservatoire was very still, but outside the bells were ringing, and carts laden with evergreens and holly were passing up and down the hard glittering road, for it was the eve of Christmas Day—the day when Angela was to have gone forth in bridal bravery

to meet her love. She remembered how once in tender seriousness he had said to her:

"When that day comes, whatever happens, you will not fail me, angel mine: you will come to me for better, or for worse?"

And she had answered that she would not fail.

Before the early misty twilight fell, she had fought the battle royal and done violence to herself. God had given her the last of the three great things that go to make the glorious trinity of a woman's love: loyalty, perfect comprehension, and humility.

In the dusk and the frosty gloom, she went to her stricken love. She would sooner and more easily have died for him, but since that could not be, she knew that she would live for him. By his side she knelt; there, where he sick and sightless lay, she held her arms towards him, saying only:

"Dearest, I have not failed you. I have come."

KATHLEEN WATSON.

FINIS.

"FINIS,"—he closed a blotted page,
And, seeing naught but failure, wept;
Then dropped his weary head, and slept,
For he had cares on him, and age.

Where the last line was trembling writ
The sad tears fell, and washed the word:
Came ONE, and saw the margin blurred—
And stooped, and wrote afresh on it.

He woke. Is this the setting sun,
Or the red birth of the new day?
That sends a glorious, golden ray
Across the legend "Chapter One"!

G. B. STUART.

THE FIELD OF ISANDHLWANA.*

By Lieut.-Colonel Mahony, C.M.G.

THE troop ship *Ontario* was lying at the South Pier jetty in Portsmouth Dockyard in readiness to embark the 1st Battalion Cardiff Volunteers, momentarily expected alongside by train from Aldershot.

On the poop of the vessel an officer was standing in a moody attitude, regarding two persons, a lady and a gentleman, who were in earnest conversation on the pier; the gentleman was in the undress uniform of the Cardiff Regiment, as was also the observer on the ship.

After a while the whistle of the advancing train was heard, and presently it drew up on the siding. The couple on the jetty then took a hasty farewell, as the vessel was under orders to proceed to sea the moment the last man had been embarked. The lady, dropping a thick veil over her face to hide the fast-falling tears, fell back a space and joined an elderly woman who stood a little apart, and together they waited till the ship had been loosed from its moorings and passed into the fair way of the harbour, continuing to wave adieus as long as answering signals could be observed from the ship; after which they took their departure, the young lady sobbing bitterly.

Captain Beauchamp had only been married to the lady from whom he had just parted about a fortnight, when, owing to disturbances at the Cape, he had been recalled from his honeymoon trip, the regiment to which he belonged having been placed under immediate orders for active service.

The story of their love was a romantic one, and not altogether unattended by some unpleasantness. Milly Clarkson lived with an invalid sister and an old attached servant, or, more properly, a humble friend. They lived at Dover, and were fairly well off. Milly, the younger of the two sisters, was an accomplished artist, and, while sitting one day at an open window, the breeze caught one of her sketches, and wafted it into the street below; this being observed by two gentlemen passing, one of them ran quickly forward, closely followed by his companion, and managed to secure it, just as the young lady had opened the door to search for the errant sketch. She thanked them very sweetly for their attention, and they on their part, having now an opportunity of observing her more nearly, were greatly struck by her beauty, and considered themselves fortunate in being able to render this slight service.

After the interchange of a few polite speeches the gentlemen took their leave.

* Isandula.

Major Verdon and Captain Beauchamp of the Cardiff Regiment were fast friends, shared all amusements together, and were inseparable off duty, and when practicable took leave of absence at the same time, living always on the best and happiest terms; and this continued unbrokenly until the occurrence of the incident narrated above.

The friends subsequently made the usual formal call, and were received very warmly by the sisters. This was succeeded by other visits, which ultimately developed into great intimacy, causing, unfortunately, for the first time, a break in the hitherto close companionship of the two officers, who took to making calls separately, each endeavouring to avoid the other on such occasions. But in the end it became clear to Major Verdon that he was the one too many at their pleasant re-unions. He was a very self-contained man, but with an outward demeanour of calmness he kept the fiercest passions in check; he viewed with very bitter feelings the favour shown to his friend, having for the first time in his life fallen head over ears in love.

By degrees, however, he dropped off visiting the family, and the estrangement between himself and Captain Beauchamp slowly but surely widened, until at last they scarcely ever met except on duty.

Although fully anticipating it, he did not hear without a pang that Beauchamp and Miss Clarkson were engaged; but when the marriage took place, he obtained leave of absence, pleading pressing business for not attending the ceremony. He felt a vague sort of exultation when the order came for the regiment to proceed on active service, though he could scarcely define to himself how or why his satisfaction arose.

Major Verdon was the onlooker of the farewell interview between husband and wife.

The ship sped on its voyage, but nothing of any consequence occurred during the passage, the whilom friends maintaining a studied distance towards each other, never coming in contact except when the necessities of the service compelled them to meet.

On arriving at Simon's Bay they were detained for a few days to coal, and also to embark some reinforcement drafts awaiting them from the Cape Town garrison.

During their detention the officers were permitted to go on shore, and they rambled over the high table-land and rocky eminences in the vicinity. In one of these rambles Captain Beauchamp came across an ostrich farm, and feeling a curiosity to ascertain the *modus operandi* by which these huge birds were kept in subjection, and learn something of the method followed to obtain the valuable feathers of the biped, he stepped across the narrow boundary which confined them to the limits of the farm.

He had hardly entered the enclosure when an ostrich came quickly towards him; and being a man fond of animals and birds, he went unsuspiciously forward with the intention of petting him and stroking his long neck, being evidently unaware of the occasional outbursts of

savage temper to which these birds give way, though they are easily managed by their regular attendants, mostly little Kaffir boys. As they approached each other—the Captain entertaining no misgivings—the ostrich raised one of his powerful forefeet, and struck the officer full on the breast, knocking him clean over, and breaking his collar-bone. Rising with difficulty, he defended himself as best he could with his walking-stick ; but would no doubt have been seriously injured, if not killed, had not Mr. Van Rensburg, the owner of the farm (who fortunately chanced to catch sight of the encounter), rushed up and rescued him.

The injured officer warmly thanked this gentleman, who assisted him to his house, and had his hurts attended to, and also despatched a messenger to the ship to explain the cause of his detention.

"But, mynheer," said the hospitable Dutchman later on, "what a strange thing that one of your officers was looking on from behind a hedge of prickly pear at a time when you were in real danger, lying on the ground, and in a position where you might have been kicked to death, and did not stir to your assistance."

"What do you say?" replied Beauchamp. "An English officer! impossible! you must be mistaken."

"No mistake, Herr Captain ; and little Jan Noote, my herd-boy, told me he was running towards you when the Rooibatje (red soldier) standing behind the hedge, held him back. He brought me this stick," he continued, turning towards an inner room, "which the gentleman dropped in the sluit hard by, whence it was carried down by the stream ; the boy recovered it subsequently."

Beauchamp looked at the stick, and recognised it as one he had often seen in possession of Major Verdon.

"I should like to take this, Herr Rensburg, if you will permit me," said the officer.

"Ya! certainly, mynheer," replied the Dutchman ; "take it and welcome."

In due course a conveyance arrived, in which were the doctor and one of his brother officers, and they all three (after the injured officer's wounds had been attended to) returned on board, as the ship was to sail early on the following morning for East London, where they were under orders to disembark, and proceed to King William's Town.

At this station they arrived late one night.

The following morning they were again *en route*, making for the Perie Forest, a mountainous, thickly-wooded tract of country to which the old Gaika chief, Sandilli, had retired with some two thousand men of his tribe, occupying the strong positions of Murray's Krantz and Gozo heights, the latter a flat-topped hill of great natural strength where every approach was commanded.

To this point the Cardiff Regiment was directed to march, and on arrival, the Colonel invested the place as closely as the troops at his

command would permit; but notwithstanding the heavy fire that was brought to bear, all their efforts failed to drive the old Unkose from his fastness. Captain Beauchamp had perforce to be left behind for the present, but just before the regiment marched off, he stepped out on the barrack square, his arm still in a sling, watching the preparations, and chafing at his own inactivity.

Major Verdon coming up at this juncture, halted irresolutely for awhile; then addressing Beauchamp said, in a sneering tone:

"You're lucky not to be coming out just now; it's rather warm work at the front; Saltmarshe and another fellow of the 90th were killed yesterday and a lot of their men. But you were always lucky, you know; even ostriches don't hurt you much."

"Stay a moment," replied the other coldly. "I've something belonging to you," and turning into his quarters, he re-appeared in a couple of minutes with the stick given to him by the Dutch farmer. Major Verdon had been joined by two or three other officers by this time, and his back was towards Beauchamp. As the latter approached, he turned round, and catching sight of the stick, became deadly pale. His once friend went close up to him, and in a low voice, said: "This was found in the sluit behind the prickly-pear hedge on Van Rensburg's farm. The Kaffir boy," he added, meaningly, "recovered it."

The Major answered not a word, but taking the stick (which from its peculiar shape was well known to belong to him) he handed it to his orderly and joined the battalion, now formed up for marching. The observers looked curiously on, knowing there was (as they phrased it) "something up," but not understanding the situation, as Beauchamp had not mentioned to any one what the Dutchman had told him.

After a week's detention at King William's Town he declared himself well enough to take over the command of his company, and was consequently drafted to the front, where he found the regiment in the situation previously described.

One wing of the corps under command of Major Verdon was extended in a zigzag direction up the side of the cliff, which embraced the forest land at the foot of Gozo heights. Here the fire was very brisk, and all lay close down except the Colonel, who appeared to disdain the shelter he had himself enjoined upon those under his command, sauntering from point to point with the greatest nonchalance.

At this juncture an aide-de-camp came spurring up the rocky way, and, saluting the Colonel, said:

"The General wishes you to send a company from your right to search the wood towards the Zwagerhoek; Major Buller has gone with a party to try and cut a path round to the summit if possible, the men of his rear guard have been lost sight of, and it is necessary we should be in communication with them; the officer in command of the party you send must be instructed to look out for Buller, and reinforce him if necessary."

"Major Verdon," said the Colonel addressing that officer, "detail a company of your wing for an advance by way of the drift."

Now the drift was a crossing which led directly into the bush, and except in the rainy season had but a few inches of water flowing across its sandy bed. It was the most exposed part of the position, and the Cardiff Regiment had been posted on the right and left of it. It was fully commanded by the enemy, as all attempts to pass between the wings on either side, brought down a hail of bullets, cutting up the sand in small showers, and leaving the usual leaden smears on the rocky boulders around.

Major Verdon, after saluting his superior, went off at a quick pace to the right of his line, a strange light in his eye.

"Captain Beauchamp," he said, addressing that officer, "advance with your company by way of the drift, open communication with Major Buller, and re-inforce him should he require it."

"We shall lose heavily in crossing," I fear, was the Captain's reply, "as the place is so exposed; and I think——"

"Am I to tell the Colonel," said the other interrupting, "that you think the service too dangerous?"

"I was about to add," returned the Captain coldly, "that it would be as well to have the ambulance at hand, as I shall be certain to lose a number of men; that was my——"

"Oh! we'll take care of that," retorted the Major. "Don't be afraid," he added with a sneer.

Stung by the innuendo conveyed in this last phrase, the young officer replied hotly: "You shall answer to me for this, Major Verdon, when the campaign is over; I'll submit to insult from no man."

Before anything further could be said, the Colonel came up, and addressing Captain Beauchamp, told him not to expose his men unnecessarily, but to make a dash across the open for the thick scrub at the base of the hill before commencing his search. Clenching his teeth he turned towards his company, and forming them in extended order he waited a favourable opportunity. Presently his voice rang out:

"Prepare to advance! double!" and at the head of his men he went with a rush across the open.

Before reaching the cover in front he lost twenty men; the bugler at his side was shot dead, and he himself had a narrow escape, a bullet passing through his helmet. Then with the remainder of the company he vanished in the thick underwood, an occasional shot indicating their whereabouts from time to time.

It may here be stated that Buller * succeeded, after immense difficulties, in cutting a way to the top of the hitherto inaccessible stronghold of the Gaika chief, by which the heights were subsequently stormed, and the scattered remnant of the once formidable tribe streamed away towards the Amotalas. Sandelli (all the old fire and spirit departed) told them to leave him as he could go no further—his heart was

* Now Sir Redvers Buller.

broken. One Induna remained with him, in whose arms he died that night, and the English gave him reverent and honourable interment.

But events were marching onwards in South Africa. Hardly had this comparatively insignificant outbreak been quelled, when news reached King William's Town that Sir Bartle Frere had handed over Zululand to be dealt with by Lord Chelmsford, and the Cardiff Regiment, with all the other disposable force in the old Colony, were hurriedly embarked for Natal, where on arrival no time was lost in despatching them to the front.

A clear bright morning and that *soupçon* of cold in the air which is found so invigorating in the early dawn of a South African day, before the sun has obtained its greater power. The high tableland of Helpmakaar was crowded with marching troops, active members of the staff, and busy transport officers, all *en route* for the steep irregular defile doing duty for a road that led to Rorke's Drift, where it was intended to establish a depot of supplies for the main body about to cross the Buffalo into Zululand.

A short march over the open flat brought them to the head of the pass, and then commenced the difficult task of getting heavily-armed men, waggons laden with ammunition and stores, ambulance waggons, etc., down a precipitous boulder-choked way, presenting almost insuperable difficulties to their onward progress.

It was an ideal position for an ambuscade, and had the Zulu leader been an enterprising character, it is not too much to imagine that no man of the force would have lived to reach the drift. However, they arrived in safety at the river's bank, and leaving one company under command of Lieutenant Bromhead posted in the missionaries' house, the crossing was safely effected by means of a punt. Marching inland for ten miles, the General ordered a halt at the foot, and under the shadow of Isandhlwana Hill, where Major Verdon was left in immediate charge of certain companies of the regiment, the whole party that were ordered to encamp there being under the command of Colonel Pulleine; while Lord Chelmsford pushed on to the left, where his scouts had reported the main body of the Zulu force was posted.

We have not to do here with the well-worn story of "Isandula" (as it is erroneously called). It is now known that the General, recognised by the army as an able and accomplished soldier, was badly served by the Intelligence Department; for, although several columns of the Zulu army lay ensconced in dongas, running traversely in his front and right, no one, whose duty it was to ascertain, appeared to have the slightest knowledge of the circumstance, and the General with his staff moved off, in full confidence that he would come up with the enemy during the morning's march.

What happened is now a matter of history, and it is only with an episode of the calamitous affair we have at present to deal.

About an hour after the headquarters had marched, sounds of

heavy firing were heard in front, and the brave but ill-fated Colonel Durnford, who was in advance with his personal following of mounted Basutos, soon became alive to the true state of affairs, and sent in a pressing request for reinforcements. These were promptly despatched, but the forces opposed were so numerous, and the several companies so unavoidably scattered, that they were powerless to contend successfully against the odds opposed; notwithstanding, they fought with desperate courage to the last, and were slain to a man.

Captain Beauchamp had been ordered to take up a position about three-quarters of a mile to the left front, while a second company under Captain Mostyn was moved to the right in prolongation of the line, following the curves of a deep ravine. Major Verdon was specially detailed to command both companies in the forward movement; and accordingly, placing himself at their head, he moved promptly towards the point indicated.

Suddenly from out of the ravine (or donga) they were approaching, there swarmed thousands of Zulus, armed for the most part with assegais, though a large number carried fire-arms, wearing a rude kind of bandolier strung across their naked shoulders. On came the foe in their favourite formation when opposed to a weaker body: one central mass, from which were despatched to the right and left, a stream of braves extending swiftly in a crescent form, being re-inforced from time to time, until the two horns joined and crushed the doomed men within its folds.

At the commencement of these movements, Captain Beauchamp. with true soldierly instinct, saw that the best to be done was to join forces with Mostyn, as divided they would be at considerable disadvantage, and in pursuance of this idea began gradually to take ground to the right; but while he was in the act of doing so, Major Verdon rode furiously up, exclaiming:

"What are you doing, Captain Beauchamp? Keep your ground why do you move without orders?"

It was at this moment the Zulus burst in view, and the Captain, without a word, pointed in their direction, adding briefly:

"I was about to re-inforce Mostyn."

"If you move another step, I'll send you to the rear a prisoner; you seem to be a little too careful of yourself, sir," he added, contemptuously. Then in a loud voice: "There is the enemy; do your duty," and he rode away.

The contemplated movement was by this time impossible, so forming his men in a hollow square he faced the opposing hosts with that cool courage and determination which has ever been the distinguishing features of the English officer in moments of peril.

But, alas! from the first their case was hopeless, and when every man of the company lay dead around, he, though severely wounded, fought manfully on, using sword and revolver, his dauntless bearing eliciting shouts of admiration from even his savage assailants.

At length an assegai was thrown which entered his chest, this (as related by a chief subsequently) he seized and twisted out of the wound,* shooting the man who had launched it, and then dropped exhausted on the pile of dead around, when he was finally despatched.

Meanwhile Mostyn was attacked in a similar manner, and was joined by the Major, who, to give him his due, was as brave as a lion, but the odds were enormous and they gradually succumbed, fighting doggedly on till no living man of the force remained, and there they lay on that blood-soaked ground, exposed to all the changes of the elements, for four long months till re-inforcements having arrived from England the country was again occupied, when their bleached remains were sorrowfully interred; a church now marking the spot where so many gallant hearts ceased to beat.

Sad to say, the effect on Mrs. Beauchamp was disastrous; she was in the street when the first news of the massacre reached England, and, hastening to hear the nature of the "News from South Africa," bawled out by the newspaper vendors, was just in time to hear her husband's name read out amongst the killed, and fell senseless to the ground. She never rallied from the shock, and until her death (which occurred soon after) was under the delusion that the old letters received from her husband previous to his death had arrived by the last mail, and would proceed to tell any casual visitor the news they contained.

Major Verdon's action since the first estrangement took place between the friends could only be accounted for in one way: of a really generous disposition, it is supposed that his feelings became so overwrought at seeing his friend preferred by one with whom he was himself madly in love, his mind had given way, urging him to acts that were foreign to his real nature.

Both men fell on that fatal January morning, and their bones lay whitening on the plain within a few yards of each other until the last mournful rites had been performed over them, and those others, their companions in death, whose lives, loves, hopes, and ambitions had perished on the bloody field of Isandhlwana.

* Fact.

THE STREGA'S CURSE.

By Lady Margaret Majendie.

CHAPTER XV.

COLOMBA went back to Lalla's little house and lay down on her hard, narrow bed. She had an almost mechanical instinct that rest was necessary to enable her to go through her work that night, and her journey the next day.

She fell into a profound and dreamless sleep. Hours passed, and it was past midnight, when the latch was raised, and old Lalla let herself in.

She struck a light and came forward to Cola's bedside.

The girl stirred uneasily in her sleep, and when Lalla let the light flare in her face, she sat up and looked at her, comprehension slowly dawning in her magnificent sleepy eyes.

"I have done what you wished, my beauty," said the old woman; "I have got it here safely. You have only to pay me the promised price and it is yours."

"You are sure, quite sure, that it will prove fatal?"

"You distrust me, foolish girl? You forget that for years, from all parts of the country, people have come to me for tokens of my power. Do you remember Lippo?"

"Remember Lippo? Was he not my playfellow?"

"Do you remember the year in which Lippo went off for a soldier, and wrote back word that the innkeeper's daughter at San Domenico had blue eyes, and hair like Madonna's own? Think you that that letter was not as wormwood to some young hearts in Maiano, and that one at least did not come to Lalla, clever, kind Lalla, for revenge? Do you remember his return?"

Colomba shivered and moaned. One bright winter's morning, when the snow was on the tall mountain-tops, the young soldier had come home with hollow cheeks and brilliant fever-lighted eyes; a cough that gave him no rest or peace, till he laid his head on his mother's breast and died.

"It was your doing?" she cried, recoiling.

"Not mine. What has poor Lalla to do with it? She does not apply her own remedies. She sells the means of revenge. It is not my affair. Let those look to it who make use of them. They are swift and sure. It is in your own power even now to withdraw, but listen, my beauty. When Lippo went down the mountain with the light heart and oft-changing love of a soldier-life, he left no wife, no

deserted love to curse him; his death was brought about by simple jealousy. He had never done as other men have done, gone through a mockery of marriage, blighted the whole life, past, present and future, of one who might have been a queen in her great beauty—turned her into the scorn and scoff of all the place, gone off gaily to wed, perhaps in earnest, with some dark-eyed girl with white hands and glittering rings, one more fit to mate with him, as she would understand his momentary folly, pardon and laugh over it with him."

"Stop! stop!" cried Cola. "Say no more or you will drive me mad; and I have so much to do, so much that with all my power I must keep my senses. Here, take your price. Give me the horrible deadly thing."

She sat up and began to unbind the two great plaits of her hair.

"Shall not I cut them off as they are?" said the Strega eagerly. "Why unfasten them?"

"Have you scissors or shears strong enough to cut through?" said the girl. "They are very thick and strong."

"They are magnificent," said the old woman. "Are you not sorry to part with them?"

Colomba shook her head. "Why should I care now?" she said.

A momentary regret had crossed even Lalla's mind as with knife and scissors alternately she hacked her way through the great plaits. She knew that they would be worth a large sum of money to the barber, who would soon be coming to Maiano again, and who would never know that they were severed from the head of the woman he had long adored, because she would have left the place.

"There, that is done," said the girl, passing her hand through the short thick locks that were left. "My head feels light and cool."

"They will grow again."

"Perhaps, but it does not matter now. Give me the thing. Tell me how I must use it."

Lalla put a little square box into her hands—a box perhaps a foot or fourteen inches square, locked with a key.

"You will find directions as to use when the time comes," she said. "Meanwhile, my beauty, you have your work cut out for you; you have to find him."

Cola did not answer, she thrust the box under her pillow and lay back.

"I am going to sleep now," she said.

"Colomba," said the old woman eagerly. "If you dream to-night, tell me your dream—I wish to take numbers in the lottery—and a dream with one's head on the Strega's work will bring good luck. You will give me your dream?"

"Let me sleep," cried the girl; "I do not want to dream. I want rest; I want to forget."

She closed her eyes, and in one moment fell once more into profound slumber.

Lalla extinguished the light, and crept into her own bed.

It was a strangely godless house. There was not a single picture or image of saint or Madonna, no crucifix to sanctify the hearth, no shell for holy water. In no other house in the village, possibly in all the country, was there such absence of all that could consecrate.

When Colomba lay down to sleep, though she said no words of prayer, her hand mechanically obeyed the force of holy custom, and she signed herself with the cross. That was all that stood between her and all unholy influences on that dark night.

Colomba passed from the heavy stillness of perfect insensibility, into the strange dream world; so weird, sometimes so beautiful, always so piteously unprofitable.

Dreams are very cruel, sometimes bringing back such vivid pictures of lost happiness, that awakening is the sharpest agony poor human nature can endure; sometimes refusing altogether, with obstinate denial, to bring such small pitiful solace as that faint uncertain imagery could give.

The dream-world was very strange and weird to Colomba that night. She seemed to be entering into a region that was intensely, wonderfully bright. Her feet trod as it were on air or clouds, something so strong and fresh and buoyant, that the very sense of motion was glorious. Just in front of her, standing in this luminous glow of light, without background or any of the accessories of earthly landscape, a figure, standing like her own on clouds and in space, a form which she recognised as the one joy and love of her life, her young husband Livio.

She held out her arms to him with a little cry, and the cry seemed to be taken up, and to re-echo from side to side, all round her everywhere, with a clamour of sound which caused her acute terror. He came swiftly towards her, and she tried to meet his hands, but they were impalpable; he was but a ghost; there was no touch possible; only an overpowering glory of great happiness, that once more she saw him face to face.

Colomba tried to speak to him again, but the fearful resounding echoes caught up her words, and in terror she was silent. He held out his hand; she could not touch or feel it, but she was conscious of being wafted on faster and faster, through this brilliant unresisting space, till quite suddenly, the wind became cold and biting. She found that Livio's hand in hers was becoming real and strong; then her feet were conscious of solidity. There was a thick ice-cold fog which enveloped them, and when it cleared away, they were standing on firm land, a wonderfully fair and beautiful land, and something seemed to tell her that they had alighted on a new star.

"Livio, darling, are we to live here? To make this a new and perfect home?"

But he did not answer. He only looked at her, always out of his great sorrowful eyes.

"Livio!"

He bent forward. He did not speak, but through her mind flashed his answer to her cry: "There is that in your possession that must keep us ever apart—the Strega's curse."

Colomba woke with so wild a cry of anguish, that old Lalla leapt to her feet.

"You have been dreaming?" she cried eagerly. "Do not forget it; tell me at once—at once, Cola."

"I will not! why do you torment me? Am I not miserable enough?"

"You shall tell me! I have done all I possibly can for you. You shall not throw me over thus! Tell me your dream."

"I dreamed that Maddalena and I were lost on the bleak side of Monte Ceteri, and that we fought for our lives with wolves. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, yes; I am more than satisfied. Go to sleep in peace."

"Lalla," said Cola, "have you no crucifix? not even a rosary you could lend me? I am afraid."

"No, no; go to sleep."

"No cross?"

"Lie down and be still."

With a faint moan the girl obeyed.

Early the next morning Lalla was up and about. She went to an old carved oak chest, that stood in a corner of her room, and threw it open. It was full of the old rubbish that, sooner or later, finds its way down to the curiosity shops. There were rolls of silk damask, plentifully bespattered with wax, which betrayed that they had once been church hangings; there were broken ivories, a tangled mass of silver fringe, a black Byzantine saint, or tavola, some strings of glass beads, and worthless lava earrings; and from the midst of it all, wrapt up in a bundle of old yellow Greek lace, she drew out the treasured Libro de Sogni, the popular guide to the great public lotteries.

It was a curious book full of engravings of every event, every creature, every idea that could cross the human imagination, arranged alphabetically; every event, every substantive bearing its corresponding number.

Lalla turned over the pages rapidly, and selected three subjects:—wolves, No. 40062; sister, No. 8910; mountain, No. 12444. Very quickly she wrote down these numbers.

She was still engaged in doing so, when she saw that Colomba was awake, and was watching her.

"Is that the book of dreams?" she said.

"Yes, my beauty. I am making my choice of numbers."

"Will you let me do so also?"

"Yes, yes."

Colomba took the book, and turned over the leaves. "What shall I choose?" she said.

"I cannot advise; one must choose for oneself."

Then Colomba made her selection. She looked out star, space, strega, and wrote down their corresponding numbers.

"And now I must dress," she said. "I shall go straight to the diligence; perhaps Maddalena will come there to see me off."

"And you will say no farewells, not even to your father?"

Colomba clenched her hands. "Be silent," she said; "remember that. As for me, I never forget."

CHAPTER XVI

It was evening, a grey soft evening in the late autumn before the early winter frosts had set in. The tender colouring suited the tints of the Val d'Arno, always grey and white with the shimmering silver of the olive groves, when the wind blew through them. All was of that uniform silvery tint; a landscape tenderly pencilled rather than painted; except on the distant horizon, where, under the cloudy veil of smoke-coloured clouds, there was a clear shining sky of the palest primrose yellow.

Through the narrow lanes of this fair Val d'Arno, lanes fenced in with great stone pargetted walls, a little *carritella* was driving with the rapidity of the wind.

Don Giacopo Baldara was a rich man; he possessed the usual complement of heavily-built state carriages, with clumsy over-fed horses; but he never used them when he could help it, he would always drive himself in this favourite mountain-cart, as light as a feather, and drawn by a little eager high-bred pony, thin and swift as a greyhound, with gaily jingling bells on its harness, and a fox's brush mounted in silver under its chin. Little Biondino was so high couraged that she could not bear to be pulled up and made to walk when they came to the sudden steep hills.

This evening old Don Giacopo was coming home in great enjoyment, for he was bringing with him his young friend and supreme favourite Gian.

Don Giacopo had so much to say, that it was delightful to have a listener; and such a listener! one who was always ready with his cordial sympathy with every interest, as well as every crisis in life.

The little pony sped on, and Gian could only just edge in a question he was most anxious to ask.

"And tell me, my friend," he said—"just only tell me this, how is Livio?"

"Livio! why he is well again; still a little languid, of course, enough to be interesting. He lies on the sofa in the evening, and my sister pets him; he is beginning to look more like himself, now that he has only his black moustache."

"Then he has shaved?" said Gian, so eagerly that Don Giacopo

laughed: "It seems to be a matter of consummate importance then! yes, he has shaved; I am sorry, the beard hid the thinness of his face. Aimée, you know, has gone."

"Gone! where?"

"Only back to the convent. She missed a whole *trimestre*, and the superior was in a great fuss about it. She is educated enough for my taste, but her aunt is not yet satisfied."

"I am sorry that I shall not see her," said Gian absently.

"Well, to return to what I was saying, my friend; I think that I have made the best bargain I ever made in my life. You know, at least you have heard me speak of Nino Dori's work?"

"Sappi's partner! oh, yes, it is very well-known now. So his prices are not yet exorbitant. I am surprised. I hear that even in England they are asking for his work."

"Listen then; to me, his prices will never be exorbitant, for it is I, even I myself, that have been the making of him. I have been for more than two hours at his *atelier* to-day. He is doing a jewel-casket for me, and he will not stick to it. He is doing at the same time stalls for a great church at Vienna, panels for some Englishman, a cabinet for the Aldobrandini, and my casket. When I ask how it gets on, all he will say is 'Vossignoria knows that the work is very minute; my eyes are my fortune—I must be careful.'"

"Has he promised it for any given time?"

"No; he will not. 'Vossignoria knows,' the rascal says, 'that if I promise a thing I must fulfil it; therefore I make no promises.'"

"That is an honest man," said Gian, laughing.

"Yes, yes, honest enough. Well, to-day, as I sat watching him at work—not at my work, *per Bacco!* but at the great alto-relievo stalls of his German church—I saw something very remarkable."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. You say you have been to Scappi's house. Did you ever see any of the women-folk?"

"Oh, yes; a little fat tub of a wife sometimes answers the door; Nino calls her Pippa."

"Bah! There is in that house a beauty such as has not lived in Florence since the days of Raphael."

"And you saw her?"

"I was, as I tell you, sitting by Nino, tormenting him for his remissness in not doing my work first, while he worked on without a word of excuse, the villain, when the door was thrown open, and in came this vision of beauty."

"What was she like?" said Gian, smiling at his old friend's enthusiasm.

"Like! I nearly fell off my chair at the sight of her. She is a Juno, tall, magnificent, with the great ox-eyes of classic fame, a mouth shaped in the lines of perfect beauty, full rounded chin. She was dressed in a long gown of dark chesnut-coloured velvet, she had

diamond rings on her fingers. The curious thing was that her hair was cut quite short, the only mistake in her most perfect knowledge of the way to make the most of her grand beauty; it was in thick short locks, waved rather than curled all over her head—it was an incongruity."

"And who was the splendid dame—a model?"

"It is a most curious and romantic story," said Don Giacopo, in his eagerness shaking the reins so that sensitive little Biondino made a bound in the air which caused the little carriage to dance.

"This girl is not a lady at all; in spite of her splendid gown and diamonds she is only a contadina. You know that Dori himself is not town-bred; he comes from a quarryman's village in the hills, called Maiano."

All the half-lazy indifference with which Gian had been listening to his old friend vanished at the sound of that name; he started into an upright position.

"Maiano!" he exclaimed—"this girl comes from Maiano?"

"Yes. Do you know the place?"

"I have been there. Go on with your story."

"It is a strange one. The girl's name is Colomba Bondi. She is some sort of relation of Nino's, a *fiancée* perhaps, though he denies that, and was sulky when I attempted to speak of it to him. This girl, the daughter of poor stone-cutters in that mountain village, is now a rich heiress; she has won the great prize in the lottery."

"O Heaven!"

It was an involuntary exclamation. The strange, almost incredible news was perfectly terrible to Gian. Colomba in Florence! Colomba rich and powerful, no longer hidden and buried with all her sorrows and her wrongs in her isolated village home. What would happen now? In the strength and insolence of her new wealth, would not all the coarse want of civilisation, that had been so hateful to him, become a thousand times more hateful? He shuddered so sharply that his old friend turned to him, anxiously asked him whether he felt chilled, and commented on his ghastly paleness.

In the uneasiness of his spirit Gian answered impatiently:

"It is nothing, my friend. I am interested in this strange story of yours. What does this haughty beauty intend to do with her wealth and loveliness?"

"She is a girl of some character," said Don Giacopo, smiling. "She is anxious to be educated, so Nino tells me, and when that is accomplished, who knows?"

"Will she not marry Nino Dori?"

"Nino! the poor hunchback! How can you imagine such an impossibility! but then, you have not seen her! Well, here we are! See! Christina and Livio are on the steps to welcome you. Cola! I have brought him," he shouted cheerily as little Biondino made a spirited dart round the corner, and drew up before the wide steps of the villa with a suddenness that made all her little bells clash.

"Welcome! welcome!" cried Livio coming down the steps, while Signora Christina stood waiting with smiling face and outstretched hands.

Both exclaimed at Gian's looks; and indeed he was very pale, and there was an odd look about him that might have been taken for fear or timidity if he had not been among such intimate and loving friends.

Poor Gian! the burden of his secret had taken all the bright joyousness out of his youth. He was an anxious careworn man, easily startled, always carrying about with him the secret dread of a discovery which would alienate from him his best friends; for would Livio (whom he loved as a dear brother) ever forgive him for the lie which had made of him an unconscious traitor to the woman who should have been his wife.

Livio looked very delicate still, and it was very evident that his strength was far from being re-established. Even this moment in the chill evening air alarmed his mother, and in spite of his laughing protestations she hurried him in.

While Gian was changing his dress before dinner, the one thought was absorbing his mind. Don Giacopo was quite sure to tell over and over again the story of the beautiful contadina whom he had seen in Nino's *atelier*. Would the names re-awaken any of the lost chords in Livio's memory? It seemed to him an absolute impossibility that they should fail to do so. The very name of Colomba had conjured up in his own mind so extraordinarily vivid a recollection of her. He could see her in his imagination as he had seen her first, leaning against the dark carouba tree, with the scarlet japonica flowers in her dark hair—he could hear the loud undisciplined tones with their hissing Tuscan accent which used to set his teeth on edge. It was all so vivid to him, that how could it be possible that all should have been so completely blotted out from Livio's memory? The drops of perspiration broke out on his brow and his teeth chattered as he nerved himself to go down and face what must inevitably come.

CHAPTER XVII.

Dinner was ready when Gian went down, and Don Giacopo conducted his sister-in-law to her place while the two young men followed; Livio in high spirits at the arrival of his friend, Gian trying with all his might to conceal his perturbation and control his twitching lips.

During the first part of dinner, Don Giacopo was too much occupied with the enjoyment of his meal to embark on a long story, and Livio was more interested in questioning his friend on all that was passing in their regiment than in Florentine news.

It seemed to Gian that at last the vigour and animation of health were beginning to return to his friend. When he asked him after one comrade and another by name, laughing over little old mess-room jokes, the idle loves of one, the bets of another, it seemed to Gian that his memory must have returned in full force. Then he was suddenly startled by Livio saying: "Some day, Gian, we must get leave, as we missed all our leave this year owing to this wretched illness of mine, and we might carry out our old scheme of a walking tour in the mountains."

Gian looked up at the moment in doubt, and caught a look of warning in Signora Christina's eyes—very slight, only a flash, but enough to pull him up, make him stammer, and have recourse to a glass of wine to hide his perplexity.

"All right," he said; and Livio went on talking of old plans that they had made in the beginning of this ill-fated year.

But the long-dreaded moment came at last; dessert was put on the table. Don Giacopo helped himself to a handful of little leathery white figs, tough as india-rubber, and a glass of madeira, and began his long-winded history of the day he had passed.

When he arrived at the minute and detailed account of Colomba, her beauty and her dress, Gian found it almost impossible to conceal his anxiety; he was white as a sheet, and gnawed his moustache.

But Livio heard the whole story with no emotion whatever beyond a light laugh at his uncle's enthusiasm; even when Don Giacopo pronounced her name with a rolling emphasis, which made poor conscious Gian shudder, and look furtively at his friend—Colomba Bondi—a mouthful of o's and b's—Livio did not wince, showed not the slightest interest in his uncle's story beyond the attention due from courtesy.

Presently Signora Christina rose. Don Giacopo and Livio went to the smoking-room, and Gian followed her into her own favourite salon.

"Gian," she said, turning to him when she had carefully shut the door, "I saw that you were startled by what occurred at dinner."

"I startled?—indeed no!" stammered Gian, the colour rushing into his face.

"And yet it was enough to startle you," went on Signora Christina, seating herself in a low chair, and unfurling her large black fan. "But I will tell you all about it."

Gian could only look at her in blank amazement as she went on:

"I also was greatly startled when I first heard Livio talk as he did to-night, about asking for leave, etc. I consulted Morello about it."

"Ah!"

It was a long-drawn sigh. Gian understood now, it was the lapse in his friend's memory to which Donna Christina was alluding—nothing to do with his fatal secret.

"You need not be anxious," she went on tenderly, "Morello says

that it is not of the slightest consequence. He says it is an understood though rare result of malarial fever when it affects the brain to the extent that it did in my poor boy's case ; a given period of life is a dead blank to him, blotted out of his memory as completely as if it were wiped off a slate."

"And does it last for ever?" said Gian huskily.

Donna Christina put her hand on his. "I see you are alarmed," she said kindly ; "but indeed there is no need. Sometimes it lasts all through life, sometimes some trifle seems suddenly to turn the key and memory returns ; but this, Morello says, is rare, although he has himself witnessed an instance of it. One thing Morello insists upon very strongly—on no account are we to let Livio become aware of this lapse in his memory—it is a thing of small consequence now, but the fact of his becoming aware that such a thing has happened might give him a dangerous shock."

Gian passed his hand over his brow.

"I can see that," he said thoughtfully. "Did Morello tell you anything about that case to which he alluded, to whom memory was restored?"

"Yes, it was a curious story. The man had a bad illness again, was delirious, and on his recovery was restored to perfection of memory, but Morello assures me that it is rare, and that I must not look to it. Meanwhile, the point at which his memory breaks off is in barracks at Pisa, and the whole episode of his summer leave and journey with you, has been blotted out of his life. After all, it is unimportant ; you never told me where you went."

"I sprained my ankle at Spezzia," said Gian indirectly. "That is one of the events gone from Livio's memory, and then you remember we were suddenly recalled to Pisa, Livio fell ill the same day, so suddenly that Morello thought there was sunstroke as well as malaria."

"Yes, and you, his best and kindest friend, brought him home. Never can I forget all that you have been to us."

Gian stifled a sigh as he bent forward, took the long white hand, and raised it to his lips.

Presently Livio and his uncle came in. Livio threw himself down on a low stool and laid his head on his mother's knee.

"Stroke my hair, mother," he said. "Stroke it nicely until I feel as if I must purr like a cat. I want to be made not to think."

"Are you tired, my darling?" said his mother anxiously ; while Gian, accustomed like herself to watch for every token of weakness, bent forward to look at him.

"Not tired, only bothered. Go on stroking, mother, and let me ask questions. Did I ever know a Colomba?"

"Yes," said Donna Christina, "Colomba de Pauli, Aimée's school companion."

"Ah, perhaps that accounts for the familiarity of the name. Had she black hair and fine eyes?"

"No, no; you are thinking of her Russian mother, Contesse Nadia. She was splendid."

"There, that is nice! I am beginning to purr now; I wish I were a veritable cat."

Livio was asleep before the words were out of his mouth.

Donna Christina looked up at Gian with a smile, certain to meet an answering tenderness in his gaze at the handsome weary face of the young fellow they both loved so dearly.

"He does not seem to me at all strong yet," said Gian anxiously.

"Ah, but we must have patience. Morello says that it will be some time yet before he is quite recovered."

She went out, stroking the thick dark hair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In the Borgo San Jacopo Nino was working away might and main, casting hope, sorrow, and the bitter disappointment of his life all into one sacrifice to his art.

"I cannot be happy; I will be great!" he said to himself, and it needed all his strong will to steady the delicate touch of his nervous fingers. The work grew beneath his hands with marvellous beauty. It was the old story of Genius fed and sustained and forced into perfection by bitter human pain.

In the first hours of the fulfilment of his plan, Nino had fancied within himself that to have his divinity dwelling under his roof would be an all-sufficient happiness. Knowing the depth of his own devotion to her, he fancied that in the new variety of life he could make her happy again, could teach her to forget. He himself would never have dared to offer her his home, but she had asked for shelter; surely such devotion, such care as he could lavish on her, would heal her wounds and make her if not happy, at least peaceful.

Little Pippa, taking her cue from Nino, received Colomba as if she had been a queen.

At sight of her gloomy beauty, Pippa resigned her first idea, which was to love and pity her as a dear sister; she shrivelled up into an awe-struck adoration, she waited on her, did not venture to speak unless addressed, and crept as much out of the way as she could. Colomba never noticed her, pushed aside the children, and spoke to no one but Nino, and sat all day with tightly-clenched hands, looking out into the street.

Little Pippa had obeyed Colomba's first request, had gone meekly out and taken the lottery tickets for her which corresponded with the three words she had chosen—Star, Space, Strega—three S's.

When Pippa came home one day, half awe-stricken, half elated, to tell Colomba that she had won the great prize, she did not know what

to expect, whether triumphant joy or at least some pious thanksgiving.

But Colomba received the news with an extraordinary apathy—an apathy so strange that all the evening Nino watched her furtively, half frightened.

Pippa slipped out for an hour's chat with the vendor of pots and pans round the corner; it was such a relief to escape from this tragic state of things into a light atmosphere of frivolous talk, where no one ever discussed anything more important than the price of butter and polenta.

In the morning, Nino was always at work early. Pippa would be down before daybreak with her hair all hanging down her back, to make him hot coffee, after which she went back to her bed again. Nino liked the clear morning light, but it was no reason why other people should do so also.

But on this morning Colomba also had risen early. She had not slept all night, and yet her eyes did not look dim or heavy; on the contrary, they were more shining than usual when she came in and stood by Nino's work.

"Good morning, Cola," he said, looking up into her face with troubled eyes. "Have you slept well?"

"I have been thinking," she answered, drawing a wooden stool forward and seating herself. "We cannot go on like this, Nino."

He threw down his tools with a despairing gesture. "Not go on, Cola? What do you mean? Are you not content?"

"Content!"

She gave a strangely bitter emphasis to the word.

"But what can I do for you?" he asked. "Will not the change of life, of surroundings, help you? My poor, poor child, can I do nothing for you?"

"You cannot help me," said Colomba; "and I have brought on you, and into this once gay cheerful house, the gloom which made my father's home unbearable."

Nino sighed, he could not deny it; but the very fact of Colomba having recognised it herself gave him a momentary feeling of pleasure that some consideration for others had at last penetrated her intense self-absorption.

"It is a joy, a privilege to have you here," he faltered. "Pippa feels it so."

"Pippa? Poor Pippa, she will be glad enough to be freed from that honour and privilege."

"Freed, Cola? What do you mean?"

"This money," she answered—"you must see it—it changes all the aspect of things. I am rich."

"You realise it, and it gives you pleasure?"

Colomba paused a moment before she answered, speaking slowly: "It gives me the means of making myself my husband's equal—

it gives me the chance of meeting him again some day in his own world."

"Poor child!" said Nino sorrowfully. "The world is very wide, and life is cruel."

"And so I am going away, Nino—alone. Hush, hush! I *will* be alone. I bring a gloom and curse on all who love me, and I must escape from them; I will leave them all, let them forget me."

"Where will you go?" said Nino, biting his pale lips.

"Ah, for that I must also depend on you. Have you no friend among all the noble ladies and gentlemen who are always here, who can tell you of some way to educate myself—to make me into a lady like themselves?"

"Yes," said Nino thoughtfully, "I will consult my old friend and patron Don Giacopo Baldaro."

"Lose no time, Nino. I am young, but life is short."

Colomba busied herself in buying clothes, splendid costly garments. The shrewd instincts of the true peasant clung to her, and she bought not real, but imitation diamond rings. They flashed on her brown hands as brilliantly as those she had seen once on Donna Christina's fingers; she thought that no one could detect the difference. Nino saw it at once, he recognised the fact that they flashed too much, that they overdid their part; but he said nothing, all his powers were absorbed in strong effort to endure, not to betray the throbbing of his broken heart. He could not come out of such an atmosphere of large pain to wince over such trifles as Cola's foolish mock diamonds.

Humbly, quietly, he asked for Don Giacopo's help and advice; by Cola's wish he told him the full extent and depth of her absolute ignorance.

Don Giacopo accepted the responsibility of adviser with great gusto, strongly recommended the convent in which Aimée de Marcelin was being educated. It was the only educational establishment of which he knew anything, and he himself undertook all the preliminary inquiries and arrangements.

When the answer came to his letter from the superior of St. Marie d'Anjou, he found himself obliged to constitute Colomba his own especial *protégée*, for she was not eligible without some such introduction. He was highly delighted with the importance and amusement of the *rôle* he was playing, and he felt that it gave him a fair excuse to demand a personal interview with Nino's beautiful ward.

Nino, in fear and trembling, asked Colomba if she objected; but she was quite ready, and she received the old gentleman with a strange kind of sullen dignity which impressed him with the same awe that was felt by all who came across her.

She said very little, and his usual loquacity completely deserted him, so that he was glad to turn to Nino to draw him into the very difficult uphill conversation.

Presently Colomba said very quietly: "One thing I must ask you to mention, *Eccelenza*, if you write to the reverend mother."

"Yes?" he said with a mixture of kindliness and admiration in his tone.

"Tell her that I am married."

"Married!—impossible!" and he looked at Nino in utter amazement.

"Yes," she went on very calmly. "Nino has told you part of my history; I am a contadina. In our village we marry young. Heaven is not always kind; I have lost my husband."

There was not a sound of hesitation or faltering in her speech.

"It is true," said Nino, answering Don Giacopo's questioning look. "It is quite true, the poor child, and it is since then, within the last weeks, that she has won the great prize and has become rich."

"You will vouch for all this, Nino? I may accept this story entirely on your responsibility."

Colomba rose to her feet. "I will leave you to talk of it," she said. "If you can help me, I thank you; if not, doubtless there are other means."

And she drew her heavy velvet gown round her, and left the room.

"She is magnificent! superb!" exclaimed Don Giacopo. "And she has lost her husband—what was he?"

"He was a soldier—he did not treat her well—let us not talk of him."

"Ah, so that accounts for the tragedy in her face. I will write at once, and you may be assured, my friend, that she shall be received, and that for my sake her education shall have every attention. And now, my casket——"

Nino smiled. He went to a corner of his *atelier* and drew a large blue-striped cloth from off some object standing there.

"Finished? impossible! You do not say so! Ah, rascal, you have been making a fool of me. You never told me that the other panels were done. *Per Bacco!* never, no never in all my life have I seen such work! It must be seen, exhibited! It should make your fortune. You villain, you wanted to surprise me."

And the enchanted dilettante positively seized the artist round the neck and embraced him. It was a *chef d'œuvre*, and Nino knew it well, and on his pale cheek came a flush of joy and triumph in his great success. He could not fail to recognise the genius that had been nurtured on such bitter pain.

CHAPTER XIX.

"And you will send nothing to Maiano—to your parents, to Maddalena?"

"Why should I? they have enough. To have enough is to be rich."

"Ah well, perhaps you are right, but the long dull life of ceaseless toil can be brightened sometimes, can be made sweeter by a little ease."

"They were hard and harsh to me; my father struck me."

"Cola," said Nino sorrowfully, "your great sorrow should have softened you and taught you sympathy."

"They did not sympathise with me."

"Nor you with them. You exacted all, you gave nothing."

"You weary me," said Colomba; "leave me alone, why cannot you all let me go my own way and be as miserable as I like? Why cannot I lead my own life?"

"Because God has not willed it so," said Nino solemnly. "You are responsible for the influence you have on the lives of those around you."

"Then I will go away—away to the dark yellow rushing river, and find there rest and an end to this ugly, hateful life."

Nino said nothing, but as he bent over his work his pale lips moved. He was asking that some discipline, some strong power, should mould this wild rebellious nature.

She rose restlessly and went to the window.

"There is nothing to see this side," she said, "nothing but river and sky and the far-off green of the cascine trees. I am going into Pippa's room to watch the street. One can never tell; in a busy town, some day——"

She did not finish her sentence, but with one of her habitual long moaning sighs she left the room.

Nino looked after her wistfully, but he did not follow her. He could not spend his life wandering after her restless steps from room to room; his heart and life and hand alike were disciplined; a noble scroll of acanthus leaves was growing under his master-touch.

Pippa was standing at the open window, her arms a-kimbo, shouting to some neighbour in the street.

"Twenty centissimi! bah, don't tell me. My cousin sold two of them for ten each and one was cracked, only she put the paper price on the crack, and who will be the wiser until it bursts in the fire. Twenty indeed!"

"Well, nobody asks you to have them," shouted a shrill voice in the street. "He who won't pay can't expect to have my goods. *Avanti!*"

This with a loud whoop as the vendor of pots in the street urged on his mule with his cargo of wares.

Pippo stood watching till they were out of sight. "He will be back soon," she said to herself with a laugh. An old woman over the way lifted up her voice and shouted:

"Well done, la Pippa. If his exactions are allowed to go on, we shall have to give twenty for goods worth ten. He is a churl—a miserable, grasping churl. O la! when one thinks what a heart of gold his mother was."

"Who was his mother?" said Pippa, always alive to a piece of gossip.

"His mother? She washed clothes in the Mugnone. Yes, yes, a good washer, and a responsible, good woman, but obstinate. No mule was ever so obstinate. The river rose one night—do you remember that rising? Bah, it was before you were born! The river flooded all over the lower parts of the town. Janina was in her bed and the river came in. She took no notice. Some folks say she had a fit from the fright, but those who knew her best declare it was from sheer obstinacy; she always said what hadn't been before wouldn't happen now, and she would not give up her opinion, and go upstairs like her neighbours. Bah, it was bad to be drowned in that dirty muddy water, and for one who had spent all her life in washing —*via!*"

"And to think that one so faithful to the past should have a son whose one thought is to raise his prices! I have given ten centessimi and I am not going to give more. Maria Santissima!" Her voice quavered into consternation, for Colomba had come into the room and laid her hand on her shoulder. Pippa's bright manner vanished into a look of awe.

"The signora will sit in the window?" she said. "See, I will arrange the cushions that Nino bought yesterday. So, now the chair is not so bad. Can I do anything more?"

"Nothing," answered Colomba, indifferently.

She threw herself back among the great yellow damask cushions that Nino had bought for her the day before, with a feeling that this colour would harmonise with her colouring.

"I want nothing," she repeated, and she leant her elbow on the window-sill looking out.

Pippa turned, and, walking almost on tiptoe, left the room.

The coming of this wonderful stranger had not added to the happiness of Pippa's life. It brought a restraint upon her of which she had never had any experience; the thing that worried the poor faithful little woman beyond anything was that, do what she might to conceal it, she could not like this new inmate of their home. It made her miserable to see the absolute indifference with which the proud self-absorbed girl received all the tender care and consideration of Nino. Nino's one thought seemed to be what he could devise to make her happy and content, and, on her part, she received all this homage as due to her—in fact, she was too much self-absorbed to recognise it. This Pippa could not understand. She thought that no woman with any heart at all could fail to note how changed Nino was. The bright, spirited manner of his work had degenerated into quiet plodding. His lips were always compressed, and the fine delicate face had grown very pale, while a certain weariness of movement and gesture betrayed the deformity as it had never been betrayed before.

Pippa, who loved him, who actually worshipped him as the

guardian-angel of her husband and children, read it all with woman's heart and eye. She saw that the light of hope had been quenched in his life. She saw that the glamour of love was dying out of his imagination: that the destruction of the ideal which had been his glory and inspiration had caused him even more suffering than the disappointment of his hope.

Pippa's little loving heart knew more even than this. She knew that he had tried to infuse a new kind of life into his work. She knew of a hidden work which as yet no other eyes had beheld. Nino had carved for his old patron, and his work was a masterpiece, but it did not satisfy the craving sorrow of his life.

Nino accepted Pippa's knowledge of his secret work, trusting her so completely that he never dreamed of asking her to respect his secret. He only smiled and patted her hand kindly when he recognised the awe-stricken manner which conveyed to him the highest appreciation of his success. For the new work was a crucifix, so beautiful that little Pippa never looked on it without the lowering of voice and rapid sign of the cross, which testified to the marvellously devotional character he had been able to throw into it.

In this holy work, and with strong prayer, Nino had found the peace which had settled down on his pale face and large soft eyes—a peace which had calmed and tamed the erratic pulses of his thin, nervous hand. Day after day, when the fading light warned him that he must spare eyes and labour, he was to be seen kneeling in the soft grey shadows of the fair church of Santo Spirito, kneeling in absolute stillness, his face bowed, absorbed in prayer.

There in the dying light, where nothing broke the gloom of the grey stone pillars (colouring which gives a peculiarly shadowy, spiritual atmosphere to that lovely church), Nino offered up all the strong pain of his life, his great sorrows, his sad infirmity, his passionate broken heart.

There he learnt the great lesson of the storms of life, and there only he found peace.

Pippa saw it, recognised it, and stood by, with a feeling that she was watching the fashioning of a saint out of common clay.

Pippa was busy in her kitchen, Nino with large tools sketching out with bold touches a new group of leaves, when suddenly all were startled by the sound of a strange harsh cry. It was not loud, but the sound penetrated to the *atelier* and to the kitchen, and throwing all aside, Nino and Pippa, even the half-blind Scappi and the frightened child, rushed to the spot.

Colomba was standing by the open window; as they entered she sprang forward.

"Do not stop me—stand back!" she cried. Nino caught hold of her, but she tore herself away. "It is Gian!—Gian! I see him; let me go!" she cried; and before they could prevent her, she had dashed downstairs and was in the street.

Nino turned a look of despair on Pippa. "Is it her husband?" she cried, trying hard to suppress her tears, for she had been terrified.

"No; his friend. I must follow her. Heaven pity us!" said poor Nino, rapidly going into the street.

There was no sign of Colomba; only wondering curious neighbours were all staring out of their windows and doors, and pointing down the street towards the Ponte Vecchio, the old bridge covered with its quaint jewellers' shops, and in that direction Nino followed.

He pursued her as fast as he could go, but his weak frame could not overtake her rapid movements. As he ran, the very terror of some indignity, some *exposé* disgraceful to Colomba, weighed on him like lead. It was shameful, disgraceful to his refined nature, this flight of hers through the broad open street in the eyes of the whole town; his pale cheek burned, he panted hard, he longed, yet dreaded indescribably to come within sight of her.

It had happened thus to Colomba. Seated at the window watching, as always, every figure that passed down the street, she had suddenly recognised the tall slight figure and soldier-like gait of the man she had always known as Gian. Perceiving that her cry to attract his attention failed to do so, she followed him with a wild determination to force him into an explanation. He was not alone, another man was with him, but she heeded nothing.

Rushing into the street, regardless of all but her own mad wish, Colomba flew after the fast disappearing figures. The two officers were walking quickly, they were in a hurry, and they were half way across the bridge before she came up with them.

About the centre of the quaint old bridge, wide arches overhead frame in a beautiful view of the broad river with its picturesque embankments, and far-off distant view.

Under one of these arches Gian had paused for one moment. He was about to relight a cigar which in the eagerness of conversation had gone out. With a rush as of a whirlwind, Colomba came upon him, followed by a little eager, noisy crowd.

Colomba laid her hand upon his shoulder, she was panting hard. At the sight of her flushed face, her burning eyes, the clenched teeth through which each deep-drawn breath seemed to hiss, Gian started back in a kind of terror.

"Marco!" he exclaimed.

His companion looked on the strange scene with intense surprise and keen annoyance, for the spectators were increasing on the bridge.

"Gian, Gian!" cried Colomba, recovering her voice, "tell me, what have you done with my husband?"

Gian did not answer; he had grown white, almost livid. The girl's hand was clutching his shoulder fiercely. Marco, his friend, stroked his moustache and exclaimed, "*Per Bacco!*"

The scene became more exciting every moment. "Where is my husband? I will know the truth—tell me!" cried Colomba.

At this moment the crowd was pushed aside, thrust away by the strong impulse of the rescuer, and Nino advanced.

"Cola," he cried in a voice which strove to be calm—"Cola, listen to me; you must come away."

But Cola only repeated her words louder still. "Gian, false coward! tell me the truth: what have you done with my husband?"

Murmurs began to rise through the crowd.

"Why can't you speak to her?" cried one; and another said roughly, "Have you no tongue?"

The officer whom Gian had called Marco interfered. "Captain Montana," he said, "probably this is some fatal mistake. Do you know this woman or her husband?"

Then came on Gian the most fearful temptation of his life. In one short second of time all the consequences that must inevitably follow an acknowledgment that he knew her, rushed into his mind. Then all concealment must be at an end. Livio must know, he would never forgive. The cold drops of anguish stood on Gian's brow; what should he do or say?

"I think," said Marco, in a low voice very coldly, "that if you can satisfy the people that this is a mistake, it will be better."

"My husband, where is he?" cried Colomba. The colour was coming and going fearfully in her face.

Then the evil conquered the good, and Gian sullied his honour with a lie. "How should I know?" he said.

"Then you do not know this woman?" said Marco anxiously.

"No; I do not know her."

Then Colomba's hand fell from his shoulder, a sudden terrible consciousness came over her, of strange eyes, curious glances all round, witnessing her disgrace. It was all clear to her now. This man had denied her; then Livio also was false—a liar and a traitor.

In her mute despair the woman's beauty was so magnificent that the crowd stood looking at her with a sort of reverence.

To Nino the shame of it all was unendurable; but he did not shrink, he took her hand gently. "See, my child," he said, throwing at once the protection of a kind of paternal care over her, "it is all a mistake—these gentlemen will pardon us—come home with me."

There was a kind of sympathetic murmur through the crowd.

"Come with me, my child," Nino repeated, as he drew her arm through his.

All this time she had stood, a strange rigid statue of despair; now she suddenly covered her face with one hand, and allowed Nino to hold the other and lead her away.

Marco took the arm of his friend. "*Diamine!*" he exclaimed, "what a magnificent woman! but mad, is she not?"

"Yes, Heaven help her—mad," said Gian, shuddering violently.

(*To be continued.*)

LOVE'S SEASONS.

"SWEETHEART, will you marry me?
Springtime comes rejoicingly,
Scented winds are blowing soft
Down the mead and up the croft;
Primroses and violets pied
Glimmer in the greenwood shade—
When could time more fitting be,
Sweetheart, will you marry me?"

"Nay, nay, leave me yet alone,
Love is young, and not full grown."

"Surely now 'tis time to wed,
All the hawthorn blooms are shed,
And the great horse-chestnut trees
Rain thin petals down the breeze;
Fair the day and blue the skies,
Glad the air with butterflies,
Roses sweet are blushing red—
Surely it is time to wed!"

"Nay, nay, leave me yet alone,
Love's red rose is not full blown."

"If we linger love may die,
Fleet the golden hours fly;
Think not time will ling'ring stand,
Autumn's voice is in the land,
Russet-gold for green and grey,
Redder sun and short'ning day,
Till that winter draweth nigh—
If we linger love may die!"

"Nay, nay, leave me yet alone,
Love's rich harvest scarce is sown."

"Oh, the days are dark and drear!
Death pursues the waning year,
Soft and chill the snows lie white,
Ghostly wild winds call at night:
Leafless trees stretch gaunt and bare,
Dearth and sadness everywhere.
Vain 'twere now to woo you, dear—
Oh, the days are dark and drear!"

"Nay, 'tis now Love's might is shown,
Unto perfect stature grown.

"Circling seasons come and go,
Love's alone no changes know;
Sunshine pales, and storms arise,
Love alone has cloudless skies;
Swift years vanish as we gaze,
Love alone has length of days.
Lo! our life, a fleeting breath,
Love outlasteth Time and Death."

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

MISS ANNE.

A Sketch.

I.

THERE was not a cloud in the scorching blue sky, not a breath of wind stirring the silent sea, or rustling the summer foliage of the trees and shrubs in the garden; the tall, slim eucalyptus reared its weeping head towards the sun, and dreamt of a southern land and sky; and in its chequered shade, gazing up through its long tapering leaves at the hot and blazing heaven, sat a little old maid, dreaming, too, of the warmth and sunshine and joy of the dead land of the past.

Not that Miss Anne was really old—not more than thirty-eight at the most—nor were romance and love dead to her, for it was upon such dainty fare that she had fed and nourished her soul, and allowed it to intoxicate itself through the long and lonely winter months of her solitude.

But the insignia of old maid were indelibly impressed upon her. There was something faded and patient about her whole appearance, as of one who had *waited*, not *lived*, through those ten best years of a woman's life; something precise in the very way she sat, so straight and motionless, with her small narrow figure, and head rather drooping, that made one feel that hers was a little life of conventionalities, and that her daily habits were also precise and well-regulated, as only those of one leading a perfectly solitary and self-centred existence can be.

Poor little Miss Anne! She must have been so pretty, once upon a time, with blush-rose cheeks and dimples, and soft confiding eyes. But when a woman waits and waits and waits through ten long years, blush-rose cheeks lose their dewy freshness, and dimpled cheeks their roundness, and bright eyes must grow a little tired and dimmed. For you cannot nourish the heart on such meagre fare as dreams of romance and love; *life*, only, can quicken the blood and keep roses and roundness and brightness in cheeks and eyes.

Ten years—exactly ten years! Her waiting was just as old as the eucalyptus tree. Her longing and hope had grown and flourished with its growth, kept a certain greenness and youth throughout the dreariness of those ten years, just as the tree sprang fair and graceful amidst its bleak surroundings, under a cold northern sky. She remembered how, when they planted it there—he and she together stopping very often in their work to look and smile and blush at each other—he had quoted Heine's little song about the lonely fir-tree dreaming, on its snowy height, of a southern palm far away in the

land of the morning, and how she had told herself that henceforth she should be like that bleak fir-tree, dreaming of *him* in the flowery tropical world where they had first met and learnt to love each other.

But he would come back to her. "As fast as the eucalyptus grows," he had said, when they planted the little shoot that so soon grew into a tall, shapely tree, "so fast you may know that my love is growing. Like it, my love will become stronger and higher, and more worthy of you, every hour that we are parted."

These then were the two romances over which Miss Anne used to dream under the eucalyptus tree in the garden, when to all appearance there was only a dried-up little old maid sedately knitting stockings or crocheting shawls for a Working Guild. Two romances: one the romance of the past; the other the romance of the future, whose *motif* was summed up in the words, "John is coming back again."

The romance of the past was nothing unusually interesting—a boy and girl attachment, where the boy was a penniless younger son, and the girl thwarted by a matter-of-fact parent, who held practical objections to improvident marriages—the commonest thing in the world, and one that does not leave very deep scars behind. The only unusual thing in this case was that the boy and girl not only vowed to wait for each other, but actually *did* wait through ten slow-creeping years.

Anne O'Brien was the only child of a widower of crusty temper and roving habits. She was born and bred in Tasmania, where her father had some Government appointment, and the first twenty-five years of her life were spent there, or amongst the neighbouring islands. It was during an expedition to the South Sea Islands that she and John Mordaunt found out the great secret—so new and so wonderful to each boy and girl, in turn, who finds it, though in itself as old as the hills, and with just as little variety in its composition.

John was one of their party, and as he and Anne (Nan they called her in those days) were the only youthful members amongst three or four middle-aged friends of Captain O'Brien, the result was only what might have been predicted.

In that glorious climate, amongst exquisite scenery glowing with tropical luxuriance and warmth, love seemed to be born at the very first glance of eloquent eyes, the first sympathetic words between two young creatures who were both revelling in the joy and freshness of life, as it appears to us when we are twenty. To row in and out of the rich brown reefs, over a sea as blue and shining as the eyes of the girl in the stern of the boat, along shores heavy with rich vegetation, where birds of gorgeous plumage flitted amongst the beautiful foliage, was to John Mordaunt a foretaste of heaven. And Nan, unconscious at first, put down the fulness of her happiness to the beauty around her—the radiant sunshine and fairyland loveliness of those flowery isles amidst their gleaming blue waters.

How much of it was due to these calm, golden effects of Nature?

How much to John's chivalrous manliness, and Nan's girlish sweetness and charm? Be that as it may, before many weeks were over, they found that a very strong spell had been flung over them, drawing them together with a force that nothing but death (they were *sure*) could lessen. The test soon came. Captain O'Brien's health broke down, and his thoughts turned towards home with a curious persistency, considering that for more than twenty years he had delighted in colonial life. So he and Nan said "Good-bye" to all their old friends, all the sunshine and beauty the girl loved, and journeyed forth to the old home under the bleak grey sky of the north. John Mordaunt accompanied them on the long voyage, and came to see the last of them in the old country before he went back to New South Wales, where he meant to acquire a fortune for Miss Anne's sake. He was so clever that she felt confident it would be a matter of only a very few years, and together they used to build castles in the air of most magnificent structure—though, as far as that went, Miss Anne was quite ready to follow him into the meanest cottage; it was only John who thought her feet too beautiful and tender to tread on anything less precious than woven gold.

The day before he left her they planted the little eucalyptus tree in a sheltered corner of the garden. For, though the skies were bleak and the country dreary on this south-western coast of Ireland, there were sudden surprises here and there of plants and shrubs that seemed to have fallen by mistake from some hotter clime; and John declared her eucalyptus would flourish like the bay-tree.

It was here, too, that they had parted. Captain O'Brien had set his face against any engagement; but John and Nan cared very little what any one else thought concerning their future. They were certain of each other, come weal or woe. Only for a moment John felt a pang of jealous fear.

"Oh, some one will steal you from me, Nan," he cried. "Promise me you will not change."

Nan laughed with scorn at the idea.

"Steal *me* from *you?* Never! Besides, no one will try."

"Yes, they will," said John despondently; "every one will try. You don't know how lovely you are, Nan. Yes, it's no use your blushing. You are like a lovely pink flower when you blush, and that makes you prettier than ever, so that any man who saw you would fall in love with you. But you must come here every day, and see how our tree is getting on, and that will remind you of me."

"Yes, we will confide in each other. I, longing for you, and the eucalyptus longing for its native land, both here in this horrid country where it rains all the year round," sighed Nan.

"Oh, you must be plucky, Nan. Look, what jolly wild hills and sea and rocks! It's not up to *our* world, but still it is rather fine, too, in its way; and you, the eucalyptus, must struggle bravely whenever the sun shines, and try not to notice the rain. Only be brave, my

dear little Nan, and all will come right," said John, putting his strong arms round her, and looking down into her sad face with his kind steadfast eyes. "And always remember this : as fast as the eucalyptus grows, so fast my love will grow. Like it, my love will become stronger and higher, and more worthy of you, every hour that we are parted."

* * * * *

But, alas ! these pretty pink and white blossoms are the first to fall, and with the fading of the pinkness and whiteness, it is astonishing how quickly the prettiness seems to vanish too. Miss Anne could no longer be likened to a pink flower, unless it were to one dried and pressed between the pages of a book, its scent and colour long since fled. Five years' constant attendance on a querulous invalid is enough to take the glow off any woman ; and after her father's death, Miss Anne had neither money nor energy with which to face the outer world. So she remained in that bleak Irish home, where the long winters were so wet and grey, and where, to her sun-loving nature, the wild rugged scenery was utterly dreary and unsympathetic. True, she possessed a tiny fairyland in her garden, and had her golden dreams under the eucalyptus that had sprung up so gallantly, but for the rest she was, at heart, a little old maid wedded to routine.

The doctor's wife, the clergyman's maiden sisters, and a few more narrow-lived and narrow-thoughted dwellers in the village two miles off, were all that she had to depend upon for society. Every one knew that she had a romance of some sort ; and at first, romances being rare in Ballakilloge, this won her much deference. But as year after year passed by, and still Miss Anne's mysterious expectations bore no fruit, the other spinsters of the neighbourhood began to turn up their noses, and her little sentimentalities and growing old maidishness became a subject for ridicule.

The arrival of those wonderful foreign letters was quite a public event. They came about once in six months, and for at least a fortnight before they were due, Miss Anne, with her modest figure and patient face, was daily seen stealing, half guiltily, down the street towards the post-office.

"It must be going on for post time," the Misses O'Kelly would say with a contemptuous sniff. "There goes poor Miss Anne."

Letters cherished like sacred relics, and full of interest and vigour and steady affection—full of John, in short ; not the one from whom she had parted, but John grown stronger, wiser, and more experienced. Just what he used to be, only with his good qualities more fully developed, his youthful charm merged into the sterling worth of manhood.

Then, at last, there came a day when there was no foreign letter awaiting her at the post-office, though the mails were due, and he had never missed writing before. There was disappointment in Miss Anne's heart as she pattered up the stony street in her goloshes, but

of doubt—not an atom. The unclouded faith of ten years was not to be shattered in a day simply because of the non-arrival of a letter dependent upon winds and tides and steam. He might be ill—and here she hurried on nervously as if she would outstep unspoken fears—or he might have been delayed by sea, and so have missed the mail, or——

"Miss Anne! Miss Anne!" called a voice, "sure it's no forren letter for you at all this day, but jist a telegraph from Cork that got astray in the parson's bag enthirely."

It was Matt Flynn, the postman, hurrying after her, and waving an unfamiliar-looking envelope over his head. He knew, like every one else, the mysterious importance of Miss Anne's letters.

"For me? From Cork?" she said, indifferently, as she tore open the yellow envelope and glanced at the message.

Then her heart gave a great bound. For a moment, the little white houses on either side of the street seemed to reel and fall, a great white mist in front of her; whilst something, that was half delirious joy, half acute physical pain, turned her face as white as a sheet.

Only for a moment. Then outwardly as calm and collected as she considered it due to her womanly dignity always to appear before the opposite sex, she quietly read for the second time those badly-written, pencilled, wonderful words:

"I shall be with you to-morrow about half-past four. John Mordaunt, Cork."

II.

"No bad news, I hope? Nothing to distress you?" asked the eldest Miss O'Kelly, fixing her inquisitive eyes on Miss Anne's face. "Telegrams are such startling things, you know. We felt that we must come and make sure that you were not in trouble."

"No—no, thank you; it was nothing of that sort. Quite the contrary," stammered Miss Anne, with ill-suppressed cheerfulness. "That is to say, it was no bad news."

"Ah—then we may be relieved of our fears, dear Miss Anne. We were so afraid, knowing that you had not received your usual letter, that perhaps some friend was ill, or something of that sort. But, indeed, what business is it of ours."

The sisters O'Kelly had tracked her to where she was sitting under the eucalyptus tree. Nothing but curiosity could have induced them to toil so far under a scorching sun, along a shadeless road under the hills; but curiosity is an infallible spur to even the most faded of spinsters. That something unusual was about to occur was evident from Miss Anne's flutters of suppressed excitement and the smiles that kept beaming over the faded thin cheeks. On the other hand,

she looked pale and exhausted, as if the unexpected joy, whatever it was, had literally been too much for her. Miss O'Kelly pointedly remarked on this, and felt sure her friend ought not to be out so much in the sun.

"I like the sun; it is so seldom we have too much of it here," answered Miss Anne; "and I assure you my health is as good as ever it was."

"Perhaps it was that telegram," put in Miss Grace; "and not getting your letter and all. It must have given you quite a turn."

"No, no," murmured Miss Anne. A ghost of a blush mantled her cheeks. She felt so full of importance, so overwhelmed by her joy, that she longed to confide even in Miss O'Kelly. Engaged to John Mordaunt, who was coming home to-morrow to take her away with him! No wonder she was self-conscious and elated.

Then the conversation turned to the Working Guild in Aid of Distressed Irish Ladies, in a languishing way certainly, since all along the Misses O'Kelly were working up to the great secret, whilst Miss Anne's wandering thoughts were with the morrow.

"You would be a great loss to us," said Miss Grace, at last becoming desperate, "if ever you were to leave the Guild. But I suppose we may count on you as a member next year again."

The bait took. Miss Anne looked up with her tell-tale blush and tremors. An expansion of confidence and longing for sympathy came over her again.

"I—I cannot tell," she said; "next year matters may be so different, one can never be sure what may happen."

"You are not thinking of leaving us?" cried the sisters, with a crescendo of interrogation.

"No—oh, no! At least that is to say—oh, indeed, I meant nothing," Miss Anne expostulated feebly; "but next year is a long way to look forward to, Miss O'Kelly."

"Why, Miss Anne, one might think you were going to be married," cried Miss Grace, with a loud laugh to cover the pointedness of her remark; "one might indeed."

Miss Anne dropped her crochet and, clasping her hands nervously together, lowered her bashful eyes. Her secret seemed to be burning her tongue.

"Well—well—yes, Miss O'Kelly; yes, Miss Grace. Perhaps it may be so—perhaps so. Strange things happen, do they not? And you would not expect it of me—I have never given you any cause to think such a thing could happen to me. But yes, Miss Grace, you have guessed right. I think—that is, I know—I am sure that I am going to be—to be——"

"No! I could not have believed it. I never did expect it of you," ejaculated Miss O'Kelly, rising, and opening her parasol with a jerk. "But I am sure we wish you joy; though indeed it does seem strange at first—considering that you have never told us a word of it—and

your age too. But that is neither here nor there, and we are the last people to remind you of it. Well! All I can say is that you have borne your waiting nobly, Miss Anne—nobly. And may the gentleman have been as faithful on his part is the sincerest wish I can offer you."

Miss Anne watched the retreating figures with no feeling of soreness or disappointment. They were unsympathetic and suspicious; but then, poor things, they knew nothing about man's love, and how constant it can be. At all events they had never known John, so whatever might be their knowledge of love, it could not be so perfect and complete as her own.

How she hoped it would be a day like this when he arrived! How beautiful the world was in this bright sunshine! It was surprising to her now that she had been so blind to the peaceful grandeur of the hills, and the shining loveliness of the sea that encircled their feet. And how delicately the eucalyptus leaves traced themselves against the blue. *Their* tree, whose rapid growth had been such a solace to her superstitious soul, as an emblem of John's love and faith. It had shot up tall and strong during those ten years; rather an incongruity, at first sight, in that wild country, before one had found out the rare beauties that spring up in the moist soil of the Emerald Isle.

Where should she meet him? Here, where they had parted? Or quietly in the sitting-room, where no one would see if he——

Miss Anne shivered, and felt a little shocked at her own thoughts.

Should she run to meet him or wait until he came? Should she cry out with glad delight, or be silent until he had spoken? What should she wear? What would they say to each other? What would it all be like, this great, wonderful, long long dreamed of meeting?

She had gone over these questions a hundred times before; and what generally won the day was the meeting under the eucalyptus tree, she in the white gown in which he had last seen her, and in which he had told her she looked like a lovely pink flower. Not many words would be spoken; only "Nan" and "John," and then that unmentionable token that Miss Anne blushed to think of. After that, life presented a golden blank to her; imagination could go no further.

How often Miss Anne set and re-set, tapped and re-tapped the barometer in the porch that evening, it is impossible to say. Biddy, her buxom parlour-maid, felt even her stolid brain penetrated by a sense of coming revolution, and, with a shrewd guess at the nature of it, could not help staring fixedly at her mistress to see what effect it had upon her. Miss Anne blushed and fidgeted, and tried not to smile consciously. She had alway heard that the world looked upon women with different respect the moment they were engaged. Certainly it seemed to her that interested, inquisitive eyes pursued her to-day, and that the very air was charged with her secret.

"The glass is going down, Biddy. I am afraid there will be a

break in the weather," she remarked, tentatively, as she took her bedroom candle and said Good-night to the girl. "But the glass is sometimes wrong, is it not, Biddy?"

"To be sure it is, miss."

"I think it will be fine to-morrow; indeed I am sure it will be. I am very anxious that it should be fine to-morrow, Biddy, because—I am expecting a friend to see me."

"To be sure you are, miss," repeated Biddy, turning her back precipitately, and as Miss Anne paused once more to tap the weather-glass, she thought she heard a smothered giggle echoing down the back-stairs.

In the little tragedies and joys of our own lives we very seldom see how closely they are interwoven with the ridiculous, though it may be evident enough to our friends; and to Miss Anne her secret was nothing if not sublime.

* * * * *

Nothing may be perfect. Miss Anne's summer weather might just as well have lasted twenty-four hours longer, instead of turning first to a thin drizzle, then to gusts of wind and heavy rain that blurred garden and sea and hills into a dull white mist.

She could not meet him under the eucalyptus tree. But she would have a fire lit in the sitting-room, and he could stretch himself comfortably in the big arm-chair as he used to do. Even in those days some little old-maidish instinct had always prompted her to tidy and tuck back the loose chintzes which he left in such disorder. She had filled the room with flowers the day before, and this morning she usurped her cook's place and made a pile of those cakes John used to like so much. After that she sat down with her crochet, in front of the clock, thinking over the past, and over the time that was coming; and finally, with a sudden feeling of half-fright, half-shyness, stole up to her room to put on that long laid-by gown of fresh white muslin.

How strange it seemed to exchange the familiar grey stuff, for anything so youthful and bridelike. She felt almost like a widow leaving off her weeds for the first time. It was so loose too! She had no idea she had been so plump as a girl; but there was nothing to regret in that; John had always said he disliked fat women; and besides she would soon get back her old health and colour now that she was going to be happy and cared for. Should she wear a rose at her throat? There would just be time to run downstairs and get one.

In the passage she met Biddy, and this time the girl's laughter could by no means be suppressed. For a moment she stared in amazement at the strange little figure decked in bridal white, the thin face looking more than ever prematurely old, in spite of the joy radiating from her eyes; then fled downstairs.

Miss Anne ran back to her room. The slight exertion took away

her breath, and her head reeled. It was excitement, she said to herself; joy had come with too sudden a shock, and she was nervous now that the time was so near. It was four o'clock; time to be waiting quietly in the sitting-room. For a moment she hesitated. Then, scarcely knowing why, but perhaps with some dim sense of the fitness of things, she tore off the white gown, hastily slipped into the quaker-like old homespun, and in a few minutes was sitting working before the fire—a quiet, prim, reserved woman of thirty-eight.

She was only just in time. A car was dashing up the gravel drive. She heard the ring of the bell, the banging of the door, the bustle of arrival, coat, hat, and stick, flung on to the hall table, a kind of general sensation that some one was in the house whom it was not large enough to hold, and then . . .

III.

Again that feeling of faintness, of joy literally taking away her breath. Unconsciously she still went on hurriedly working; she dared not raise her head or speak. Yet she was not afraid; had not one vestige of doubt of any kind; knew that love was actually with her, here in that little room.

"Nan! I have come back. Won't you speak to me, and look at me?"

It was John's voice, full and deep, with a ring of solemn joy in it that sounded to her like music.

"Wait," she whispered. "It is too much just at first. Let me listen—and know."

"It is ten years, Nan," he went on. "How much time we have to make up for. Have you no welcome for me?"

"Oh, wait," she repeated. "It has been so sudden. Let me get used to it. It is enough, at first, to know that you are here, here in this very room. I dare not speak to you, I dare not look at you yet. Wait a few moments, John."

There was silence. And during those "few moments," John Mordaunt underwent one of those bitter tragedies that only to outsiders wear the grotesque stamp of the ridiculous. He, too, had had his illusions in those ten years—one that he had borne about with him by land and sea in a tiny morocco case—the miniature of a girl with round pink cheeks and shining eyes, in the very prime of beauty and freshness.

What he now saw was a little faded woman with straight, neatly-brushed hair, whose sunken eyes told of ill-health and perpetual dulness of life; freshness and brightness gone, without expression gained; girlhood dead; in its stead, a washed-out womanhood, with

none of the depth and completeness that intellect and experience give, in the place of youth, to stronger natures.

Nan was dead. He did not know this woman. How could he speak to her as he would have spoken to Nan? Where was the sympathy and mutual knowledge that used to exist between them? His heart sank like lead as he thought of what the future held for him in marriage with this ghost of his early love. What follies were the fancies of boys and girls!

So when Miss Anne had sufficiently recovered from her maidenly embarrassment to raise her eyes to John's face, what she saw written in it was not love and tenderness, but consternation, regret, and pitiful wonder; his first expression of affection gradually drying up into the ceremonious politeness due to any woman or stranger.

"You are greatly changed," he said, in a grave, distant way; "I should hardly have known you again."

"I should have known you anywhere," she faltered; then drew herself up stiffly. "Ten years is a long time; it leaves room for many changes."

"Yes, yes. It was very hard upon you," he said kindly. "It was wrong to bind you to me all those years; I ought never to have asked it. And few women would have gone through with it."

She did not answer, but took up her work again. Everything seemed to have come to a full-stop. She scarcely realised what had happened, but was vaguely conscious that she would have given all she possessed to live those years over again. They had been redeemed by hope; now there was nothing but blank desolation and death in her heart. For the sympathy that had been killed in John's breast, was, in hers, still alive and throbbing, and had helped her to read his unspoken thought in one lightning flash; his disappointment, his sudden knowledge that he had outgrown her, and lived *past* her.

He made an effort to speak naturally, and put her at her ease, if possible to hide from her his discovery. Already the grim humour of the situation was beginning to strike his senses, mingled with its pitiful sadness.

"I saw the eucalyptus as I drove in," he said; "what a success it has been. I always told you it would be. Now it is quite a respectable tree. Do you remember planting it?"

"I never forget anything," answered Miss Anne drily. "I have a very long memory, and there is nothing here to make me forget. We are quiet people at Ballakilloge."

"Tell me everything that has happened. How have you passed your life?" said John. "There must be more than the bare outline you gave me in your letters."

"I told you everything—everything. There is nothing for you to hear. I would far rather know what *you* have done. You have lived your life, I have only waited."

"I know, I know! 'Men must work, and women must weep.' That must always be so, and the advantage is all on our side," he said pityingly. "Five years ago I hoped our probation was over; but things went wrong, and I had to begin all over again. I have much to tell you, Nan."

She signed to him to go on, and, glad of anything to break the threatening silence, he told her the story of those ten years, conscious, all the time that every word he spoke widened the gulf between them. His eyes took in every detail of the neat little room, even to the three books on the round table; a *Leisure Hour*, a well-used *Hints on Knitting*, and a smartly-bound Wordsworth, evidently more for ornament than use. Intellect, too, had run to seed; there was not a single point at which their minds could unite in intelligent sympathy; there could never be anything more than tender pity on one side, blind admiration on the other.

Outside, the rain dashed against the windows, and the wind whirled round the garden in passionate gusts, swaying the trees to and fro, and rattling the windows as though it longed to burst into the room, and dash down the unnatural calm and stiffness of the man and woman sitting there.

John did all the talking, only pausing now and then whilst Miss Anne was counting her stitches. He stayed there for nearly two hours, which seemed to them both as though they would never end. And when at last he got up to leave her, it must be confessed that a very tough battle was being fought out between his sense of honour, and all the other senses that drew so forcibly in an opposite direction. But with John Mordaunt the issue of such struggles never hung long in the balance.

He kept Miss Anne's thin fingers in his, and looked down on her with his kind eyes.

"May I come back to-morrow, Nan?" he asked gravely. "There is one thing of which we have not spoken yet."

Does beauty consist only of perfect lines and glowing colour? For a moment Miss Anne's face, as she raised it transfigured by gratitude and adoration, had caught back some reflection of the girlish charm and brightness that had won John Mordaunt's heart amongst the summer isles of the South Sea.

IV.

THERE was a great storm that night, blowing straight from the Atlantic, so that the salt spray was seized up by the wind and dashed far inland over the shuddering leafage.

Miss Anne crouched over the wood-fire, and thought of the fishermen at sea, and wondered if John was in a like storm far away amongst the South Sea Islands. She could not so soon fall out of

the habit of thinking of him like this; she felt so dull, so exhausted after the day's unusual excitement, that it was difficult to collect her thoughts. When Biddy came to say her frugal dinner was getting cold, she told her not to wait—she was not hungry—she did not want anything to-night, except perhaps a biscuit and a cup of tea later. And Biddy, who could not understand such an event as an engagement being celebrated without eating and drinking, told Jane that Miss Anne and her sweetheart had been having "words." She felt still more convinced of this when she carried in the lamp and found her mistress in the same listless attitude, and with a scared look in her eyes.

Miss Anne drew herself up when she felt the girl's gaze upon her, and spoke nervously:

"It is a terrible night, Biddy. I seem to hear the waves rolling up the coast like thunder, and the wind cuts through me. It makes me nervous. I am afraid something terrible will happen to-night, Biddy."

"Faith, miss, it's no worse than we've had many a time o' winter. Make your mind aisy thin; why what should happen, to be sure?"

"I feel it—I feel it," she answered, with a shudder. "There! Listen, Biddy! What a gust! Oh, it is as if every tree in the garden had fallen with a crash."

"You jist frighten me, miss!" cried Biddy. "You go to bed and sleep it off, and you'll be better to-morrow, for sure."

But Miss Anne sprang up with a sharp cry, and pushed the girl from her.

"Oh, it has come, I heard it—I saw it," she moaned. "Run and see what has happened, Biddy—quick—near the eucalyptus in the garden."

Then she sank back in her chair trembling, listening eagerly to every sound; to Biddy and Jane's bright voices as they ran, gaily chattering, out into the blustery storm; to their quick footsteps going and coming; and then to their whispered conversation in the hall, outside her room. She could bear it no longer, but, suddenly opening the door, stood before them, looking like a ghost.

"Och! Miss Anne, don't look like that," exclaimed Biddy; "sure it's nothin' to fret over."

Miss Anne interrupted her very quietly, speaking like one in a trance.

"Has the eucalyptus been blown down?" she asked calmly.

Biddy took refuge in her native talent, and prevaricated.

"Sure, miss, is it likely? havin' stood sich a deal of stormin' these ten years. You jist go in to the fire, and never worry about the trees, dear heart. One gone, another comes. An' it's a long-legged strip of a thing neither, with no shade to speak of."

"It has been blown down?" repeated Miss Anne, sharply. "Answer me, Biddy."

"To be sure it has. Snapped right in its middle, an' a wonder it's stood so long; and such a lanky bit of a tree," quoth Biddy. "Faith, an' it was."

Miss Anne pressed her hand to her side as if she had been shot. For a moment she stood there, gazing straight in front of her with wide miserable eyes—looking so small and grey and narrow in that clinging grey dress; then she turned silently into her room and closed the door after her.

How cold it was! She drew her chair close up to the hearth, where the cheerful blaze had flamed itself away, and the logs burnt red and black over hot gold ashes.

She thought of the dead eucalyptus. Only yesterday it had stood in the sunshine, tall and erect as—as— Yes, she had always thought of them together. Both so tall and strong; both emblematic to her of love growing in strength through the storms of lonely years. Now it had broken; snapped in two like any other frail thing—woman's courage and man's faith; all the brave upward striving of those ten years now gone for nought.

Well, she had known it. All that evening the presentiment had been heavy upon her; ever since she had caught the look of disappointment in John's face and eyes. He would come back and claim her, and try to make her happy. But love, passion, sympathy? She knew, without understanding why, that they were gone for ever. They would be husband and wife, but their thoughts would be as far apart as their lives had been for so long. No, she, too, would be brave and save him from herself. What he loved was the pink-cheeked sunny-eyed Nan who had laughed and been young with him; and Nan had died long ago. It was only her ghost that sat there, a forlorn little old maid staring into the dying embers.

Outside in the wind and rain, the eucalyptus, smitten by a sudden storm, lay dead; and John's love was dead, and something else that was of no value to any one was passing away, too, with the night.

The wood fire had smouldered away, and the ashes lay white on the stone hearth; through a chink in the shutters crept the cold light of a pale summer dawn, falling on the motionless figure of Miss Anne, small and precise, with head slightly drooping, and the still hands primly folded for ever on her lap.

KATHERINE CARR.

IDA PFEFFER.

IN a well-to-do, but eminently commonplace, German burgher family a baby girl was born, and they baptised her in an eminently common-place way by the name of Ida. The mother was as stout, matter-of-fact a German *hausfrau* as ever ate *sauerkraut*, and she brought up the infant in a thoroughly practical, ordinary manner, until she was able to run alone. Then the unusual and the abnormal began to step into little Ida's story.

The father was a man of a very original mind; he had peculiar ideas about most things, and most especially he had peculiar ideas about female education. How he came to choose his very prosaic mate, appears to us to be, in truth, a matter of surprise, as we look at the strangely-assorted pair; except that the happiest marriages are sometimes the result of strongly-marked contrasts, and this husband and wife, certainly a strong contrast in character and opinion, yet proved to be a very happy and harmonious couple.

When their first little daughter was born, the father at once made up his mind that he would carry out with her all his extraordinary notions with regard to the education of women; and the mother, though her opinions were most diametrically opposite on the subject, yet nevertheless put the girl, as soon as she could prattle, completely into his hands.

Now the system of education which Ida's father proposed to carry out with regard to her was simply this: he was resolved that she was to be brought up precisely as if she were a boy. The little girl was dressed as a boy, and was taught to join in all boys' games. She engaged in all sorts of out-of-door exercises and sports, and became expert in running and leaping. She was taught Greek and Latin, instead of music and dancing and other feminine accomplishments; a needle was never so much as put between her fingers.

Thus things went on with little Ida till she was about ten years old, when the course of her young life was entirely changed.

The father died rather suddenly, and Ida was immediately, of course, thrown under the sole care of her mother.

No doubt the troubles of the poor lady, when left a widow, were a good deal increased by the fact that she had this anomalous being, this boy-girl, upon her hands. However, she made short work of the problem which her husband had left her; she solved it at once in her own matter-of-fact way. She popped Ida into petticoats before the girl could look around, and set her to sweep the house, and learn to cook and to sew, according to the fashion of all German maidens of her rank and age.

But the good lady soon found to her cost that she could not cut the Gordian knot in this summary way as she had intended. It was all

very well to bid Ida to do this or that in a proper housewifely manner, but it was quite another thing to get her to do it. She had been coerced into petticoats it was true, but she still persisted in being a boy to all intents and purposes. She was forced by her mother to do all sorts of domestic offices, but never were such offices performed in a like way before. Pitchers were broken, puddings were spoiled, rents were left in luckless garments, as the recusant damsel went hither and thither in the house performing her unwilling duties; and had not her mother possessed a very large fund of firm resolution, she would have given the attempt up in thorough desperation of making her daughter into a young lady.

If the good *frau* set the girl down to study a cookery-book, she found her, when she returned to the room, deep in a volume of travels; if she beheld her on a summer afternoon sewing her sampler in the garden, and her maternal eyes rejoiced in the sight, she was sure, did she look away for a few minutes, to perceive, to her dismay, that the *fraulein* had vanished, and after some search, to see her seated on the topmost branch of a tall tree; if she left the girl trundling her mop diligently, as she fondly thought, in the front hall, she would find the pail left in the lurch, while the young lady rushed after a passing post-chaise, and indulged in all sorts of airy speculations about its inmates. In short, never was unfortunate middle-aged matron so hardly bested through the pranks of a maiden.

The civil war in the household between the mother and daughter continued some five or six years, and still the refractory damsel was unsubdued. She chose to be a boy, in spite of long skirts and braided hair. She declared stoutly that she would be one, and a boy in all her tastes, in all her aspirations, in all her habits, she remained.

Then the mother hit upon a new expedient to subjugate the unruly *fraulein*, who, notwithstanding her protestations that she was a boy, and nothing but a boy, had become a very pretty girl, with a step as light and swift as a breeze, with a form as flexible as a young willow, with eyes all alight with fancy, and mirth, and romance; she resolved that she would engage a tutor for Ida, and try the effect upon her of instruction imparted by a man.

The plan succeeded even beyond the good lady's expectation.

All at once the girl became docile, meek, womanly, and domestic. No need now to chide her for housewifely duties undone. She was the very ideal at last of the household fairy of the family, who glided from room to room working noiseless spells of order. The mother looked on with approval and delight, and congratulated herself on the result of her scheme.

For some little time the mother dreamed on tranquilly a bright, peaceful dream concerning her wondrously-transformed daughter. Then there was for her a rude awakening. As she walked one day down the most sequestered side of the large garden, she caught sight of a very unexpected vision—a vision which caused the hair under

her highly-respectable cap to stand on end with horror; it was Ida in the arms of her tutor.

Here was the key to the mystery regarding the alteration in the girl. Love was the enchanter, who, with his magic wand, had touched the maiden and changed her in a moment. The tutor's ideal of a woman had been a sweet, modest, gracious, domestic being. The girl had loved him from the very outset of their intercourse, and at once she had moulded herself into his mode. What wonder that his heart had caught fire from the radiant eyes of his fair pupil, and they became affianced lovers almost before they knew it.

The mother, however, had very different views for her daughter's future. The tutor was poor, and his birth was obscure; she at once forbade him the house, and commanded Ida never to speak to him again.

Then came a time of terrible anguish for the girl, whose strong nature could do nothing by halves, and she had emphatically given away her whole heart.

There is not space here to enter into the whole history of the conflict between the mother and daughter. The end of the story only concerns us. Ida at last consented to give up her lover, but at the same time she made a vow that she would accept the first suitor that came to woo her. He came quickly in the person of a doctor of law called Pfeffer, a man twice her age, and as dry as one of his own law-books. He could have been no congenial mate for a bright, impulsive, quick-witted girl, but Ida was true to her vow, and at once accepted and married him. What was in the mother's heart, when she beheld her finished work, there is no record to say.

The marriage was in every way unfortunate. Several children were born to the pair, but the affection between them did not increase; there was no real sympathy for each other in either heart or mind. Dr. Pfeffer might have been proud of the physical attractions of his young wife, perhaps, at first, but the charm of novelty soon wore away. He was very extravagant, and moreover managed his worldly affairs extremely ill; he got into debt, and money grew more and more scarce in the family.

The time came at length when Madame Pfeffer literally did not know how to pay for the barest necessities of life for herself and her children; her husband left her, and behaved in a way at once cowardly and heartless.

Ida Pfeffer's conduct at this trying period was brave and noble in the extreme. She did not accuse her husband; she maintained a dignified silence about him; no breath of slander ever touched her reputation; she was a devoted mother, and even went without food herself, if only her children might be fed. She looked up to God, and was tranquilly cheerful even in her sorest need.

As years went on things grew gradually brighter for Ida Pfeffer. Her husband died and she was free from a heavy chain. Her brother was able to help her with a little money; her children grew up and were all gaining their own livelihood. Then there woke within her the longing for distant travel, which for years she had repressed, and she determined to satisfy it.

Then followed that series of wonderful journeys which have signalised her name.

Comparatively without money, without any of the appliances and aids to travel, in an age when female travellers were extremely rare even in Europe, she took long voyages alone, she penetrated alone into then almost unknown lands, she dwelt alone amid savage tribes. We see her in a dense South American forest, led by an Indian guide who suddenly turns upon her, and nothing but a miracle saves her through the intervention of a passing traveller. We see her wrapping herself in her cloak and calmly lying down to sleep on the deck of a vessel in a terrible storm; we see her surrounded by a crowd of cannibals, and averting death by a well-timed joke. Approaching age and infirmities did not damp her course or her thirst for adventure. Her children implored her to rest under their loving care; the Government of her country, which for some years had recognised her as one of the most remarkable women of the age, even forbade her to leave her native land; but it was all in vain: she stole away and again engaged in some dangerous distant journey.

At length the last earthly wandering came for Ida Pfeffer. According to her usual plan of concealing her projected travels, she slipped away one day from her family and took ship for Madagascar, which island at that time was in a very disturbed state. A queen reigned there who was peculiarly hostile to Europeans. She seized Madame Pfeffer, together with a few more travellers, and put them into close confinement. For some time they lingered in an unhealthy prison, with the fear of death hanging over their heads; but they were at last liberated, and Ida Pfeffer and her companions enjoyed once more freedom and safety.

These blessings, however, came too late for the courageous old traveller. Her health had been shattered by the hardships and suspense of that rigorous confinement in that trying climate. She journeyed back to her native land and died peacefully in the arms of her son. She has left for herself a fair chapter in the history of woman.

ALICE KING.

THE SILVER THIMBLES.

By George Fosbery.

YES, sir, I am a "universal provider" on a very large scale, and I am prepared to supply you at short notice with everything you can possibly require from your cradle to your grave. I am speaking literally. Metaphor is the one thing in which the interests of my business will not permit me to deal.

With regard to cradles, you can be suited at our establishment with anything from a Size 1, Untrimmed, Black Japanned, Full-height second quality Child's Cot at 17s. 6d., less five per cent. discount for cash, to a Size 2, Trimmed, 39 inch Infant's Bassinette up to any price in Black, Cream, and gold, with Pink, Sky, Cardinal, and Cream netting.

And, as to graves, we have just now a remarkably nice assortment. Eh!—what's the matter? Wandering from the point, was I? So I was. Really, I must ask you to excuse me!

I need hardly tell you that my wife, Mrs. Brownlow, is very much looked up to in our neighbourhood, and that we are admitted into the very best society. We know this, because we are on visiting terms with Mrs. Frumpington Beade, and she told us herself she was very particular, which at once put us at our ease.

Well, as I was going to say, we were invited a while ago to Mrs. Frumpington Beade's private theatricals, for which we supplied the scenery and dresses, and the music; and there I was introduced to one of the prettiest women I ever came across in my life; and *that* is saying a good deal.

Mrs. Hurlingham, the lovely lady in question, made herself very agreeable to me. After the theatrical performance she led me away to a quiet corner behind a screen in the back balcony. She asked me all about my business, and took the greatest interest in everything I told her. By way of interesting her still more, I alluded to the romantic side of my occupation. She was immensely entertained by my description of some of the tricks played by monomaniacs and the light-fingered gentry of London upon our customers and upon ourselves.

"Many a clever shop-lifter," I said, "is for all the world a real lady like yourself."

"Like me!" exclaimed pretty Mrs. Hurlingham, mistaking what I had said.

I hastened to correct the impression.

"Yes, like you; that is to say—ahem!—as beautiful as you, Mrs. Hurlingham; that is to say, not quite so!"

I flatter myself this was rather neat. Mrs. H. must have thought so too, for it made her laugh.

"I have heard something of the kind before in Paris," she said.

"Ah, Paris!" I repeated. "That reminds me that we received a warning a day or two ago from the French police against a very artful woman of this kind who has come over here for change of air, and scene."

"What is she like?" inquired charming Mrs. Hurlingham.

"What is she like?" I echoed; and then I saw my chance for another bit of smartness. "Like, why, her description might do for you—ahem! Tall, elegant figure, stylishly dressed, possessed of considerable personal charms and most fascinating address."

Mrs. Hurlingham again laughed heartily at my sally. It was rather a smart one, wasn't it? Just as well Mrs. Brownlow was down at supper!

"Do these—a—thieves ever get punished?" asked my fair companion, with a wicked little smile.

"Always," I replied, "in the end!"

"I suppose you mean that they invariably fall into the hands of the police?" she said.

"Not exactly," I replied. "We seldom prosecute. It would injure our reputation. For petty pilferers it is almost enough when they are found out in the act. I have known the shock of discovery cure more than one before now. Their conscience punishes them severely."

"Then you believe in Nemesis, Mr. Brownlow?"

I didn't know what Nemesis was; it wasn't in our catalogue. I believe it is an Egyptian mummy, and I'd guarantee to get one if you'd give me the favour of your esteemed order. So I said:

"Of course! I believe in Nemesis down to the ground."

"What," she continued, "do you really think retribution is bound to overtake the unscrupulous, however skilful they may be?"

"Bound to," I said. "You might as well doubt that honesty is the best policy. It is by always selling a good article and by strict attention to business that I have become a rich man." I said this with pardonable pride, but I regret to say it did not impress Mrs. Hurlingham as much as it ought to have done. She looked at me somewhat coldly, and said:

"I thought 'shoddy' goods and 'overworking employés' were the royal road to wealth in these days!"

Though I am not exactly thin-skinned, this remark of hers hurt me. It was spiteful, though it did not apply in the least to me. John Brownlow sells nothing but the best, or second-best, articles; and he never keeps his shop-girls standing more than ten hours a day.

"Come, come," added Mrs. Hurlingham, when she saw that I didn't care for chaff on such a subject: "I didn't mean to offend

you, Mr. Brownlow! You won't turn me out of your premises when I come there shopping, will you?" And she smiled sweetly.

"Not for worlds, ma'am—not for worlds. You shall have anything you like at cost price, if you will send in your card to my private room."

I was just finishing my sentence, in as courteous and confidential a manner as I could assume, consistently with my being a married man, you understand, when I became aware of the presence of a third party at the *tête-à-tête*. My wife had come suddenly round the screen.

Mrs. Brownlow didn't *say* anything, but I thought it best to make my bow to Mrs. Hurlingham.

"Time to go, my dear; is it?" I asked calmly of Mrs. Brownlow.

"High time!" she replied, very stiffly, as we moved away. "And pray, Mr. Brownlow, what is Mrs. Hurlingham going to send her card into your private room for?"

I needn't trouble you, gentle reader, with the ready explanation I gave. It is beneath a man of my standing to prevaricate. I told her the truth. *You* would believe that I told the truth. I am sure my wife didn't.

"And perhaps you'll be good enough to inform me who this fascinating young woman is?" resumed Mrs. Brownlow as we drove home in our comfortable brougham.

"I overheard, my dear, that she was the wife of Her Majesty's Third Secretary of Legation at some place or other abroad."

"Oh, John!" exclaimed my better-half, softening. "Why didn't you say so sooner? Her Majesty's Third Secretary of what did you say?"

"Legation, my love, Legation."

"Her Majesty's—well, there now! I knew Mrs. Frumpington Beade was very particular. Do you think I could call, John, and ask this Mrs. Hurlingham to dinner?"

"I shall be delighted—that is—I mean—I've no doubt you could, dear, if you set your mind to it."

Mrs. Brownlow did set her mind to it, and in a very short time we (that is my wife, of course) became very friendly with handsome Mrs. Hurlingham.

Meantime Mrs. Hurlingham came to be a constant visitor to Brownlow's Emporium. Sometimes she sent in her card and paid me a visit in my sanctum—strictly on business, as I need hardly say.

One day Mrs. Hurlingham sent in her card in the usual way, and was shown into my room. She looked pale and nervous. She was evidently distressed about something. As soon as she was seated she began to say, in hesitating tones, that she was in pecuniary difficulties, and that her husband was unable to send her as much money as usual from abroad. I was not to mistake her. She did not intend to borrow money. But she had some little trinkets of her own,

wedding presents, she said, for which she was anxious to obtain the full value in cash. Would I help her?

I reflected for an instant. It was obviously inconvenient that a private transaction of this sort should be carried out in my own jewellery department. It might—I merely thought it might—lead to some misunderstanding, if not scandal.

It occurred to me that I had half-an-hour to spare, a thing that had never happened to me during business hours for twenty years. I undertook her commission to dispose of the trinkets; and after handing me a little packet of rings and brooches, she expressed an amount of gratitude which I would rather Mrs. Brownlow knew nothing about. She left me, after saying she would call again on the following morning.

I took a hansom to Bond Street, and astonished my old friends Bangle and Son, the celebrated silversmiths, by paying them a morning visit. Without giving them any particulars, I told them that a friend of mine had asked me to dispose of the little packet of jewellery. They gave me a liberal sum for the parcel, and I was on the point of departing, when I noticed a tray of Indian silver thimbles, perhaps a score or so, on the counter.

"How do you sell these?" I asked out of pure curiosity, knowing we had the same article, ticketed one-and-elevenpence-three-farthings, at the Emporium.

"Half-a-crown," answered Mr. Bangle senior.

I took up one of the thimbles and looked at it. To my surprise I found that it bore on the inside our own private mark.

"Where did you get these?" I inquired, showing as little embarrassment as possible.

"A lady brought them here and pestered us till we bought them," replied Mr. Bangle junior.

"What! all the twenty?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," explained Mr. Bangle senior. "She said she had expressed a wish for an Indian silver thimble, and her friends played her a practical joke by each giving her one on her birthday. She was so angry, that she wanted to sell them all."

"Strange!" I mused. "And what was the lady like?"

I had become inquisitive.

"Tall," said Mr. Bangle senior.

"And good-looking—very good-looking," said Mr. Bangle junior, with a laugh.

"Stylishly dressed," added the elder Mr. B.

"Very elegant figure," added his son.

An awkward misgiving seized me. I was afraid to say anything more.

"Good-day, and thank you," I said, hurrying away.

"Good-day, Mr. Brownlow, and thank *you*," rejoined Messrs. Bangle and Son in a breath.

As soon as I was back again in my sanctum, I sent for the manager of our jewellery department.

"Oh—ah—by the way, Mr. Stone—have you missed anything from your counter lately?"

"Yes, sir," replied my subordinate; "I am sorry to say we have. It isn't much, and I should have mentioned it sooner, but we only discovered the loss in stock-taking this morning."

"Go on, sir," I said anxiously.

"There is a deficit of twenty Indian silver thimbles, sir. They cannot have been taken all at once without our notice. It must have been done by degrees."

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"I have no evidence to go upon, sir."

"It is not any of your staff?" I asked.

"Certainly not, sir. They are all tried men."

"Then they must have been abstracted by some person who constantly visits your counter. Have you any such person in your mind?"

"The only customer who comes to us often, sir, is the lady that sends her card in to you—a friend of yours, I believe, sir. She brings us some trifling repairs to do nearly every day. Mrs. Hurlingham, I think her name is."

For a moment I turned dizzy. Suspicion must be diverted from that quarter immediately.

"Yes," I said, sternly, "Mrs. Hurlingham is a friend of mine. She is incapable of taking the thimbles."

"Certainly," assented my manager.

"That will do for to-day. You will use the customary precautions to prevent a recurrence of this, if possible. By the way: bring me a tray of these thimbles, and leave it here. I should like to have a good look at them."

"Yes, sir."

"And—just send me Mr. Coil, the manager of the Electrical Department."

* * * * *

When Mrs. Hurlingham called next morning, I caused her to be shown into my room, and I received her with my customary manner.

I handed over to her the proceeds of the sale of her trinkets, and again she loaded me with expressions of heartfelt gratitude, and so on.

When she rose to go, I remained at my desk, instead of advancing to show her out.

Near the door stood a table, and on the table lay the tray of Indian silver thimbles which I had ordered Mr. Stone to bring to me the previous day.

Between me and this table Mrs. Hurlingham suddenly halted. I pretended to be occupied with the papers on my desk. She leant

one hand on the table, very near to the place where the thimbles lay, and then she turned towards me once more.

"Mr. Brownlow—you have done me a great service, and I am—Oh! what is this? help! I am dying!"

She had started violently, and almost fallen to the ground. I did not move, though she staggered a couple of paces forward, as one who is shot.

"No, Mrs. Hurlingham, you are not dying. There is nothing the matter, unless it is with your conscience."

"What do you mean!" she exclaimed in an agony of fright.

"You will remember," I said, "my telling you at our first meeting that retribution inevitably overtakes those who deserve it."

"Nemesis!" she gasped.

"Yes," I replied, "Nemesis, Rameses—anything you like to call it. You have had one warning to-day, evidently. Don't tempt me to repeat it. Hadn't you better return *to Paris* for your health."

The miserable woman turned as pale as a ghost. I struck my hand bell. A porter entered.

"Show this lady into a hansom, and send Mr. Coil here." The porter obeyed. Mrs. Hurlingham went out without a word.

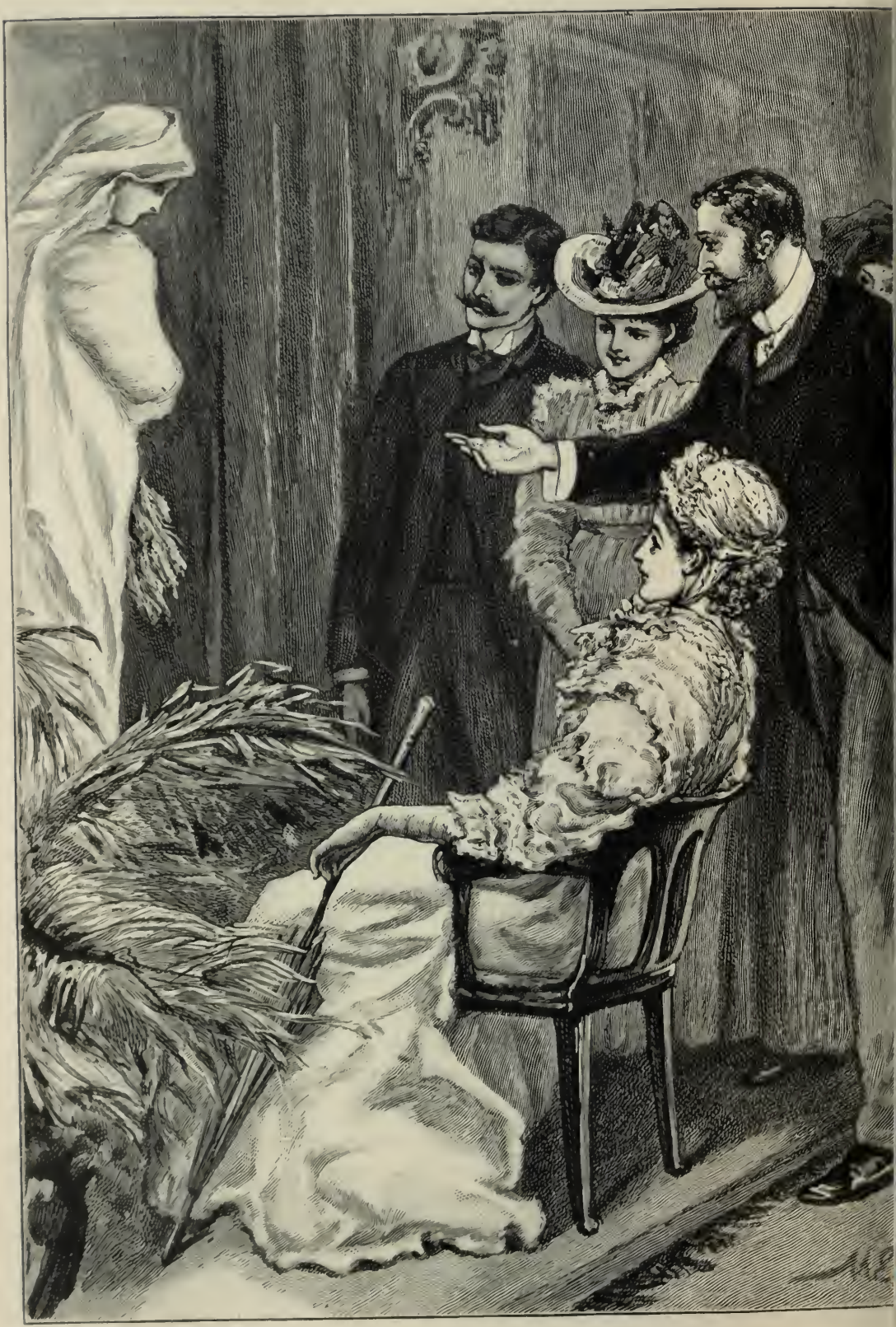
Two minutes later the manager of the Electrical Department entered the room.

"Please to disconnect that current from the silver thimbles, Mr. Coil, and take the apparatus away."

"Yes, sir."

"And by the way, as I said before, be careful to say nothing about it to anybody."

You will be glad to know that Mrs. Hurlingham left England hurriedly for the Continent. She is not likely to trouble us again. But Mrs. Brownlow, who knows nothing of all this, never ceases to regret the absence of the wife of one of Her Gracious Majesty's Third Secretaries of Legation.



THERE, IN A SMALL RECESS, WITH A CURTAIN HALF-DRAWN BEFORE IT, WAS THE STATUE OF RUTH, GLEANING.

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1893.

MR. WARRENNE:

MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE STAPYLTON GIRLS.

MAUD had one slight passing fear before her brother's return. She feared he might be altered by his travels, and estranged just a little from his family by his acquisition of fortune.

The first moment, as he threw himself from the post-chaise that brought him to the door, and rushed forward to meet his father, undeceived her. That evening—as they all three walked in the garden, crowding questions so fast upon each other that there was no possibility of answering them, and hardly a wish to hear anything but the sound of each other's voices, when Undine darted around them, and Karl was so long collecting his tools from different corners, that he might oftener cross Leonard's path and exchange with him a laughing remark in his own language—filled Maud with delight and gratitude.

The next morning Leonard was able to discuss his plans. He much wished that his father and sister would at once settle with him at Forrel Court; but that Mr. Warrenne positively declined. He hoped soon to see Leonard marry, and it was both natural and proper that he should then have his house to himself. Leonard declared, with much sincerity and earnestness, that he never intended to marry; but Maud only laughed at him, and Mr. Warrenne quietly shook his head. However, it was settled that they should be as much as possible with him during the summer; and then Leonard and Maud agreed to set out to the Woodlands, for the Scudamores were not yet apprised of his return, and he longed to see Alice in her new home.

"The Reynolds' are settled at Heathfield by this time," said Maud; "they left the Ferns last week."

"And when is Miss Reynolds to be married?" asked Leonard.

"Some time during the summer."

"I trust they will be happy," said Leonard.

"Not the least chance of that," said Maud. "No love on her side, and no esteem on his."

"Maud," said Leonard, "what nice rides we will have together. I will get you a beautiful horse, and when you are staying with me we will go out every fine evening; it is so pleasant to ride through the woods in the twilight."

"Oh, that will be delightful!" said Maud; "I have always longed to ride on horseback."

"When you are at home I shall come over to Erlsmede and fetch you," said Leonard; "you will make a desperate rider—you will have no fear."

"Fear, indeed!" cried his sister, laughing.

"Maud," resumed Leonard, after a pause, "I am vexed that we shall not all live together; I have nothing to look to beyond my own family, and however much we may contrive to meet, it is not like being under the same roof."

"And when you marry?" said Maud.

"There, again!" exclaimed Leonard; "you and my father have both got hold of the same notion."

"Men always marry," said Maud, laughing; "it is only the women who remain single."

The Scudamore party were all in the field adjoining the flower garden. Captain Scudamore had just purchased a pair of Shetland ponies for the low carriage that Alice had been heard to wish for, and it had come into her head that she should like to ride one of them. A side-saddle had been procured in haste, a shawl wrapped round her knees, and Captain Scudamore was leading the pony round the field.

Mr. Scudamore, who with Mrs. Thorne and Sir Frederic Manning, was standing by the green gate that led into the garden, received Leonard with much cordiality. Captain Scudamore soon came running by the side of the pony, which was trotting briskly. Alice, half-frightened, and half-laughing, with the deepest rose-colour in her cheeks, and her ringlets tossed and scattered in every direction, was lifted from the pony and was soon in her brother's arms.

"She does not look the worse for the air of Woodlands," said Mrs. Thorne, indicating Alice.

"I never saw her look so well," said Leonard.

"And Maud is none of your sickly, peaking young ladies," said Mrs. Thorne, planting her stud firmly on the ground. "I hate sickly people!"

"Sickly people are very cross, are they not?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Ah! you will know one day what they are," said Mrs. Thorne, in

a warning voice; "when you become a sickly, feverish old bachelor, without a soul to take care of you!"

"I know that you will come and nurse me then, Mrs. Thorne," said Sir Frederic.

"I? What impudence! In the first place I shall he dead by that time," said Mrs. Thorne.

"Then I don't engage you—remember that, Mrs. Thorne. Don't pay me any visits under those circumstances."

"Ah! Do you remember the French officer and the Sister of Charity?" said Mrs. Thorne; "that is a fine lesson for young men."

"I am not in want of such lessons," said Sir Frederic, laughing; "but here is young Warrenne-Digby ready and willing to be instructed."

"Oh, I know the story," said Leonard. "It is as old as the hills."

"You have a most choice Velasquez at Forrel Court," said Sir Frederic; "a portrait of a nun."

"I would rather have your Ruth than any work of art I ever saw," said Captain Scudamore.

"I adore that Ruth," said Sir Frederic. "I almost beggared myself to purchase it."

"Have you paid for it?" asked Mrs. Thorne.

"Oh, yes," said Sir Frederic. "I would never keep an artist waiting for his money—a tailor, or a bootmaker, *à la bonne heure*."

"Ah, you will never reform, I suppose," said Mrs. Thorne.

"Miss Warrenne, when will you come and see my Ruth?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Now, if you please," replied Maud; "it would be a pleasant walk."

"Come along, Mrs. Thorne," said Sir Frederic, offering his arm.

"What, am I to come too?" cried Mrs. Thorne, rather gratified to find that with her most eccentric toilet, Sir Frederic was not ashamed to be seen in her company. "Well, is the old man going?"

"I have not time," said Mr. Scudamore. "Dick shall go instead."

"And Alice shall ride," added Captain Scudamore; "it is rather a long walk for her."

"You are not at Forrel Court yet," said Sir Frederic to Leonard.

"No—I go to town to-morrow on business, and then come down to take possession."

"What an agreeable duty," said Sir Frederic.

"Yes," replied Leonard, sighing.

"Oh, business is detestable," said Sir Frederic, interpreting after his own idea, Leonard's sigh. "Not that I ever attend to it, but the very sight of a lawyer's table covered with papers, is enough to give one an attack of the blue devils."

"That's right," said Mrs. Thorne, "teach him all your bad ways."

"Miss Warrenne, are you a good walker?" asked Sir Frederic.

"Yes, but I don't mean to walk any more," said Maud. "Leonard is going to buy me a horse."

"Oh, then I know of one that would just suit you."

"With four black legs, I hope, Sir Frederic, and a very long tail, or else I won't condescend to ride him."

"Do you know those ladies, Miss Warrenne?" asked Sir Frederic, as a party of ladies came in sight.

"I know that they are the Stapyltons," said Maud; "yes, we speak."

The Stapyltons were very tall and very noisy; they were afflicted with harsh voices and violent spirits; therefore their approach was always heralded by a clatter which was enough, as some writer has it, 'to bother a rookery.'

Mrs. Stapylton thought very justly that with the greater number of men, noise is taken as an earnest of good temper, and therefore she did not attempt to control her daughters' vivacity.

"Two black and two red," said Sir Frederic, turning suddenly to Leonard. "I give you your choice, which will you have?"

"After you, if you please," said Leonard, smiling.

"I can't afford it," returned Sir Frederic, earnestly. "I say so wherever I go. I can't afford to keep the hounds, which I promise you I had much rather do than keep a wife. You must make up for me. Mrs. Stapylton, I don't know whether you are acquainted with my friend, Mr. Warrenne-Digby?"

"Do I know him!" exclaimed Mrs. Stapylton, advancing with outstretched hand. "Mr. Warrenne is one of the oldest friends I have in the world! His son will be always most welcome at my house. I hope that Lester and Mr. Warrenne-Digby (you remember my son Lester, you were at school with him, were you not?) will be extremely intimate. Lester is passionately fond of shooting—you shoot, of course, Mr. Warrenne-Digby?"

"I am afraid I have no taste for field sports," replied Leonard, a ttle overpowered by this very warm reception.

"Oh, but you will learn—Lester will be so happy, I am sure—anything in his power."

"You are very good," said Leonard.

"My friend Warrenne-Digby is quite a lady's man," said Sir Frederic, coming to his relief; "they never care much for hunting and shooting, you know; he is devoted to music and painting."

"An amateur! how delightful! my girls adore the fine arts! But which way are you going? I don't see why we should not join our forces. We are merely out for a ramble."

"Pray do," said Sir Frederic. "We shall have the air of the Canterbury Pilgrims."

"Ha! ha! capital! Albina, do you hear what Sir Frederic says? They are positively so delighted to meet your sister, Mr. Warrenne-Digby, they have no eyes or ears for anybody else! Albina, did you hear that about the Canterbury Pilgrims?"

Maud had, in fact, been mobbed by the Stapylton girls during the last few minutes.

"How do you do, Miss Warrenne?"

"How glad we are to have met you!"

"What an age it is since we have seen you out!"

"I suppose you have much more leisure since your sister is married?"

"I hope now that nothing will prevent our meeting *very* often."

"Do you know Sir Frederic? Is he very often at Woodlands?"

"How handsome your brother has grown! How glad you must be to have him back again?"

Maud's brain began to reel under this volley of sentences, uttered sharp and quick as a *feu-de-joie*. She looked proudly towards Leonard, and replied to the last speaker:

"Yes; I think I like him better—so much darker—it makes him look older."

"What a love of a pony!" cried Miss Laura; "I should like to steal it! Let me have a ride, Mrs. Scudamore."

As she spoke she caught up the bridle of Alice's Shetland, and pulled as if she would have dragged its head off. Upon which, very properly, the pony lifted its forefeet, and deliberately struck her down.

The sisters screamed—the mother ran forward to help her, and Captain Scudamore picked her up from among the feet of the animal. Strange to say she had received no injury; she got up, shook the dust from her dress, and relieved the anxious feelings of the society by exclaiming: "I'm not hurt, and I'm not frightened! and that's more than *you* can say for yourself, Mrs. Scudamore!"

"If she had been worth anything, she would have been killed on the spot," said Sir Frederic, in a low tone to Leonard.

"They are all horrible; can't we get away?" said Leonard, looking exceedingly distressed.

"Not for worlds! I have not been so well amused these six months!" said Sir Frederic, laughing. "Mrs. Stapylton between two lords of the manor! What an *embarras de richesses!* Buckstone should write a comedy upon it, and Wright (you know Wright?) should play Mrs. Stapylton! Besides, *mon cher*, though you are polite enough to call the red and black Stapyltons horrible, you should reflect that your sisters are not so at all. *I* have no wish to get away! It is very odd that woman won't take a hint! I have often told her I'm too poor to marry!"

"And therefore she takes you for a millionaire," said Leonard. "Poor people never talk about it."

"I must try something else then," said Sir Frederic, going up to Alice. "*A ça!* Mrs. Scudamore, have you recovered your confidence in Caliban?"

"He was very naughty!" said Alice, stroking the pony's neck.

"Do you know, Dick, I think I had rather walk the rest of the way."

"Then let me ride!" exclaimed Miss Laura. "I thought that would be the end of it! Hold the pony, there's a good soul, while I get up on it."

The good soul thus apostrophised was Sir Frederic, who obediently held the pony until the young lady was seated, and then gave him such a blow with his stick as made the animal start off like an arrow.

Miss Laura, laughing and screaming vociferously, was very soon out of sight.

"Got rid of one of them for the present," said Sir Frederic, turning complacently to Leonard.

"Thank Heaven!" retorted Leonard.

"But it's too bad to leave your sister to be bored by the other three! What can we do for her? Mrs. Scudamore, I am expending a great deal of pity on your sister; tell her so, for I don't want it to be wasted."

"Maud, come here!" said Alice. "What is the matter, dear, that Sir Frederic pities you?"

"Thank me, Miss Warrenne," said Sir Frederic; "I have given you an excuse for leaving your persecutors!"

"I really do," said Maud, laughing: "I was beginning to grow deaf under it!"

"Then take my arm to reward me," said Sir Frederic. "Mrs. Scudamore, come on the other side; let me have the pleasure for once of seeing you parted from your husband."

Alice complied with a smile. Captain Scudamore and Leonard walked on together—Mrs. Thorne was entertaining Mrs. Stapylton with a long history concerning one James Ashby and Emma Smith, whose names Mrs. Stapylton had never before heard—Sir Frederic was in high spirits, and exerted himself to amuse the sisters—and the Stapylton girls naturally grew out of temper, and complained of being tired.

"Here we are," said Sir Frederic, as they came up to the iron gates. The stone pillars were overgrown with ivy and lichen—but the gates wanted painting; the shrubberies were in disorder—everything announced that it was long since there had been a mistress at the Manor-house. The Stapylton girls rather wondered what was going to happen, and some faint hopes of luncheon began to arise in their minds; they followed in silence up the avenue, and through the hall, into the dining-room. There, in a small recess, with a curtain half-drawn before it, was the statue of Ruth, gleaning.

Maud took in silence the chair that Sir Frederic placed for her, and feasted her eyes upon this delightful work of art. Leonard looked, and passed his hand over his forehead, and looked again, and seemed at first more puzzled than pleased.

Miss Albina, after a passing glance at Ruth, had turned to the looking-glass. Miss Sarah was taking an inventory of the furniture; Miss Emily was quizzing Mrs. Thorne's old bonnet and tan gloves.

"These are the worshippers of the fine arts!" said Sir Frederic to Leonard; "the young ladies with whom you will be expected to talk *virtu*."

"I have certainly seen that before," said Leonard, unable to take his eyes off the statue. "I remember the attitude, even the features; often have I sat watching that uplifted face."

"Ah, you think so," said Sir Frederic; "and I have not had it home above three months."

"Could it have been in Gibson's studio at Rome? I was often there."

"No; it is by W——, the prince of sculptors for the female figure."

"I have it!" exclaimed Leonard; "at Mr. Thomason's—the portrait of his daughter; it stood in the window among all the gardenias and Daphnés. How could you get it?"

"Very easily. I wanted it; I had never seen anything that pleased me so much. I went to Rome; fortunately W—— had not destroyed his clay model; he would have been a fool if he had. He was a friend of mine, and after a little hesitating, he agreed to execute another statue for me. He said it was unusual, to which I acceded; in fact, as I had set my heart upon it, it was done. But 'faith, a good many people might have had the original with less trouble than I took to obtain this delicious counterfeit."

"I wonder you did not try for the original at once," said Leonard.

"Ah," said Sir Frederic, and turning round, he asked Mrs. Thorne if he might offer her some luncheon.

"Luncheon? Not I," returned Mrs. Thorne, standing up suddenly, as if all ready to start; "some people are always ready to stuff and cram at any hour in the day; they won't live to be a hundred, mark that! There is such a thing as digging your grave with your teeth; ask Mr. Warrenne. Now we have seen your image, we will make haste home; it is very pretty, your Virgin Mary."

The party rose to go. Mrs. Stapylton expressed some anxiety about that dear wild thing Laura, and Captain Scudamore felt some for the dear wild thing Caliban; but at the great gates they were set at ease by the appearance of Miss Laura, leading Caliban by the bridle, her clothes torn, her bonnet crushed, and her face scratched by the brambles; half-crying with rage and vexation, and not daring to strike the creature in return, since he knew so well how to use his forelegs. The pony had run away with her over Forrel Common, and had thrown her into a heap of furze and blackberry bushes.

Sir Frederic laughed till he cried at the spectacle. Leonard struggled to look grave, and Mrs. Thorne frankly told the young

lady "it served her right," for which proof of candour she was not held popular in the Stapylton family.

The next day Leonard went to town, where he remained some weeks. His first care was to secure to Maud the same sum that Mrs. Digby had left to Alice.

Mr. Warrenne was much pleased with the feeling that dictated this action, and in another point of view this circumstance was very welcome to him. His children being now amply provided for, he had no inducement to continue his professional labours; what he had was fully sufficient for his own wants. He, therefore, made it known, that, except to a few old friends who were unwilling to dispense with his services, he withdrew entirely from practice. The neighbouring practitioners were then at liberty to carp and wrangle for his patients more openly than they had done while he was attending them.

Leonard came back to Erlsmede as soon as he had finished his business. He seemed to have some extraordinary dislike to entering on his new mode of life. The neighbours were all in a state of excitement and anticipation; but still he lingered at his father's, until Mr. Warrenne fairly told him that he ought to put himself at the head of his own establishment, and go he must.

Very reluctantly then, and after many repeated promises from Maud and his father, that they would be much with him during the summer, he took his departure, and established himself at Forrel Court.

But every day he started for Erlsmede as soon as he had breakfasted, and seldom found his way home again till night. Sometimes he got no further than Woodlands; but either house he found more attractive than his own home. One would almost have said he *dreaded* being at Forrel.

One evening he found on his return the cards of Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Courtenay.

He almost regretted that he had not been at home when they called; he should have liked to meet Courtenay again; but as for going to Heathfield and returning the visit, that was something that he could not and would not do.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONTRADICTIONS.

The next morning, while Leonard was still loitering over the books with which his breakfast-table was always strewn, Mr. Courtenay walked into the room. He saluted him with precisely the same careless manner that was habitual to him; as if they had seen each other only the day before.

"I forced your doors to-day," said he, "because you reported yourself 'not at home' yesterday."

"I really was at Erlsmede all day," said Leonard.

"Ah! All your family well?"

"Quite. Have you breakfasted?"

"I? oh, yes; Mr. Reynolds is trying to make himself rural—we breakfast at eight."

The name of Reynolds seemed to silence Leonard. He made no reply.

"You know I am staying there, I suppose?" said Courtenay.

"Yes; I took it for granted," replied Leonard.

"You don't congratulate me," said Courtenay.

"You could hardly expect me to do so," returned Leonard.

"Here's a fellow!" said Courtenay. "You told me you had no designs in that quarter."

"I told you the truth," returned Leonard.

"I don't wish to comprehend you," remarked Courtenay, "for I am sure you don't comprehend yourself."

"Very likely," said Leonard in a dejected tone.

"What do you do with yourself all day, Moonshine?" asked Courtenay.

"Oh, I have a quantity of things to do—there are some letters I ought to write; and I promised my steward I would go and look over two small farms that he wants to throw into one," replied Leonard, looking very much wearied.

"Ay, all that is in the future—some day the letters may possibly be written, and the farms looked over—but what did you do yesterday?"

"I told you—I went yesterday to Erlsmede; and I drove Maud over to the Woodlands, to see the Scudamores."

"Ah!" said Courtenay.

"And when we got there we found that Dick and Alice had gone to Forrel Common, so we followed them."

"Ah!" said Courtenay, as if he expected his friend to proceed.

"Well, we spent the morning looking for wild strawberries."

"I hope you found some."

"Oh, yes; the turf is carpeted with them."

"That was a comfort. Afterwards?"

"We dined at the Woodlands, and I did not get home till the evening."

"And then, of course, you despatched no end of business?"

"No, for I happened to take up Uhland's poems, and I read till it was time to go to bed."

"Ah, and that, I suspect, is a fair sample of your diary. I tell you what, Moonshine, if you don't wish to be ruined, you must marry directly a woman with a strong clear head—a complete woman of business. A dreadful style of person to live with, I grant you; but in your case a necessary evil."

"I don't mean to marry," said Leonard.

"I hope then you have announced your wise intention to all the mothers in the county. When do you mean to call upon Mr. Reynolds?" asked Courtenay.

"It was only yesterday that he called," said Leonard. "I will go to-morrow or the day after."

"Now just think of the number of things you are going to do to-morrow," said Courtenay, "and don't add this to the list. Come with me at once."

"It is too early," said Leonard, looking at his watch.

"Not if you go in with me *sans façon*. I am one of the family, you know," said Courtenay, drily.

"I must wait to see that confounded fellow about the farms," said Leonard.

"Put him off once more," said Courtenay; "he is used to it; you know you have done nothing else since you came here."

"I hate to go," said Leonard, hesitating.

"I know you do," replied Courtenay, ringing the bell.

"And, besides, I heard that Miss Reynolds was in bad health," said Leonard.

"That won't prevent her father from seeing you," said Courtenay, with an ironical smile.

The servant came to the door.

"Your master wants his hat and gloves," said Courtenay.

The man looked at Leonard.

"Yes, Nicholls, my hat and gloves," said Leonard, with a sigh.

There were no more excuses to be found. Leonard set off with his friend.

"This is all very fine," said Courtenay, as they walked through the thickly-planted wood that led from the house to the gateway. "It takes at least a hundred years to make a house fit to live in—trees, turf, walls—all want age. You are very well off, Moonshine; you have done very well for yourself."

"If you knew how little I had to do with it," said Leonard, colouring.

"I believe you; I don't take you for a politician," said Courtenay.

"Here we are!" said Courtenay, after they had walked in silence for some time.

"Will you come back with me when we have got over this visit?" asked Leonard, as they entered.

"The very thing I was going to propose," replied Courtenay.

Leonard's agitation as they crossed the hall could not be concealed. He would gladly have stopped the servant in the act of throwing open the door. He heard his name announced, and followed his friend mechanically into a splendid drawing-room. Florence was seated by one of the open glass-doors in an easy-chair; she had a book in her hand which, however, she was not reading. She looked the picture of dejection—her figure seemed fallen together, her attitude

was bent, her eyes heavy, and her complexion had become pallid, almost yellow.

"How do you do?" said Courtenay, coming up to her and touching her hand.

She put back her hair and looked up, saw Leonard and turned crimson. He bowed in silence.

"I am much the same, thank you," she replied, sinking back again into her chair.

"I need not introduce Mr. Warrenne-Digby to you," remarked Courtenay. "You have not forgotten him, I daresay."

"No," replied Florence, almost inaudibly.

Leonard stood leaning against a marble slab, fixing his eyes, full of mournful interest, upon her. Courtenay threw himself into a chair.

"Shall I drive you out to-day?" he asked.

"No, thank you," said Florence, feebly.

"Are you afraid of the heat?" asked Courtenay, drily.

"Yes," said she, hurriedly; "it is warm to-day."

Courtenay said nothing, but looked at her with his peculiar compression of the brow.

"Perhaps Miss Reynolds would find it more tolerable in the evening," said Leonard, taking breath between every few words, and hardly able to articulate.

Courtenay now turned his keen brow upon Leonard.

"Thank you; I am hardly equal to any exertion," she murmured, fixing her eyes on the ground.

"Where are the children, Miss Reynolds?" asked Courtenay.

"I do not know—shall I go for them?" asked Florence, rising hurriedly from her chair.

"By no means—I cannot think of it," said Courtenay, attempting to hand her back to her seat. But Florence, murmuring some inarticulate word, moved to the door, and left the room.

"Good morning!" said Leonard, hastily coming up to Courtenay.

"Eh, Moonshine," returned that gentleman, detaining him by the hand he had offered.

"I cannot stay—I cannot stand it! Let me go at once," exclaimed Leonard, much agitated.

"How very singular," remarked Courtenay, looking calmly at him.

"For Heaven's sake, do not detain me; I cannot bear this!" said Leonard. "You are breaking her heart!"

"I? Thank you! How complimentary; I did not know before that she possessed such an article. Now don't begin your sky-rocketing, and oblige me by remaining until I go. Here come the children and their mother. Let me present you to Mrs. Reynolds."

"I thought Florence had come back," said Mrs. Reynolds, looking round. "Where is she?"

"I don't know," said Courtenay, beginning to play with the

children. "Beautiful creatures, are they not, Leonard? Which do you like best, Mrs. Reynolds?"

"Oh, for shame!—mamma loves both best," said Mrs. Reynolds, partly to Courtenay, and partly to the children.

"I know which I should like best," said he, caressing them. "I should like Lucy best, better than Edward."

The child was offended. He shook himself free from Mr. Courtenay's hold, and laid down on the floor, his dark eyes half shut, and his golden hair trailing on the carpet.

Courtenay sat watching him in silence.

"You never asked to see baby," said Mrs. Reynolds with a little laugh. "I am half jealous that you take no notice of baby."

Courtenay did not hear her; he was coaxing Edward into good humour again.

"How fond he is of children!" said Mrs. Reynolds, turning to Leonard.

"Very," returned Leonard. "The only thing he is fond of," he thought to himself.

"Come, Mrs. Reynolds," said Courtenay, looking up, "there is no reason that you should not give me Edward. I am sure one child is enough for anybody; and you will then have two. I think I shall take Edward."

"You must ask Mr. Reynolds," said the lady smiling. "I think he would be quite as unwilling to part with him as with his own boy."

"I have already asked Mr. Reynolds for one of his children," said Courtenay; "this petition concerns you alone."

Mrs. Reynolds laughed.

"I wonder what you will do with your own children," she said, "since you are so fond of other people's."

"Adore them, of course," replied Courtenay, drily.

Mrs. Reynolds looked puzzled. She never had succeeded in making him out.

Miss Reynolds had now returned to the room, and was standing by one of the open windows. She was looking out into the garden, and every now and then she coughed slightly.

Leonard, crossing over, moved a low chair close to her. She turned her head, coloured as deeply as when she first saw him, and sank down into it. Courtenay had risen to go.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Reynolds, "you can persuade Mr. Warrenne Digby to accompany you when you return to dinner."

Florence's breathless face was now turned towards Leonard. She looked as if her fate depended on his reply.

"You are very good. I regret that I have a previous engagement," said Leonard, hardly able to conceal his agitation.

"But we shall see you, of course, Mr. Courtenay?" said Mrs. Reynolds.

"Certainly," replied Courtenay.

Florence, with her head turned towards the window, was stealthily passing her handkerchief over her eyes. She recovered herself by an effort, and turned to receive their adieux. Leonard bowed without seeing anybody. Courtenay smiled at Mrs. Reynolds and the children; went up to Miss Reynolds and touched her fingers, and then followed his friend out of the room.

"We shall have a warm walk," said Courtenay, as they struck off into the fields. The blue mist was rising through the trees, the skies were overcast—it was a true summer's day.

No answer from Leonard.

"Don't you think I shall be a very happy man?" asked Courtenay with his usual dryness.

"You cannot be in earnest! It is impossible that you should mean to persist in such barbarity! She will die! She will never survive her marriage with you! Her heart is not in it!" exclaimed Leonard, with a vehemence that seemed greatly to delight his companion.

"Eh, Moonshine, are we going to have a scene?" he said.

"Be serious for an instant," exclaimed Leonard, in great agitation; "tell me that it is your intention to retract before it is too late; you cannot mean to compel her to fulfil her engagement at the expense of her future life; you will not drag her to the altar!"

"Oh, dear, no," replied Courtenay, quietly. "I assure you I don't meditate any such thing. I would not disarrange her bouquet and her lace veil on any account; she shall walk up at her own time and her own pace."

"What has she done to you that you should persecute her?" pursued Leonard, now perfectly breathless from agitation. "Cannot you see that she is wretched? That she detests you? What happiness can you propose to yourself by such a marriage?"

"Upon my word it is very refreshing," said Courtenay, turning his marble face to his companion. "You are more amusing than ever, to-day, Moonshine; what has she done, eh?"

"Yes, what has she done? She can never have wronged you."

"Has she ever wronged you?" asked Mr. Courtenay.

"If she has, I do not care to remember it at this moment," replied Leonard. "I remember nothing but that expression of bitter endurance which will haunt me to the last moments of my life. I never suffered torments to equal those of the last half-hour! To stand by and see her anguish—I, who would die for her!"

"Die for her—that's soon over," said Courtenay with his accustomed brevity.

Leonard felt in despair. Silent and unconscious, he hurried on, as if he could outstrip his thoughts.

"What a remarkable pace we are keeping up!" said Courtenay, taking off his hat; "somewhere about seven miles an hour."

Leonard slackened his pace.

"Do you think I have to bear nothing?" said Courtenay suddenly. "Do you think there is not a keener sting in that silent dejection, than all the scorn in the world?"

"But why persist in your suit?" asked Leonard in the utmost amazement.

"Spoken with your usual wisdom, my dear Moonshine," said Courtenay. "When you have been accepted by a young lady, you will perhaps learn that your suit continues—unless she has expressed a wish to withdraw."

"And that wish?" said Leonard, eagerly.

"She has never expressed," replied Courtenay.

"Yet you see she is averse to the marriage."

"I see that she is profoundly unhappy; but with a very slender opinion of my own charms, I yet do not see that it follows she is reluctant to fulfil her engagement with me."

"But what can account for her melancholy?"

"Perhaps, like myself, she is deeply attached to another person—and perhaps, unlike me, she was not born with a propensity to conceal her sentiments. Can you give me some luncheon when we get to your house?"

"You!"

"Yes; is there any particular reason why I should leave off eating and drinking? The Reynolds' don't dine before seven—such nonsense in the country—especially when one breakfasts at eight."

"You—deeply attached!"

"Oh, perhaps there is a law against *that* in my case, eh, Moonnine?"

"But I am so astonished."

"Well, I can't help that. It does not take an earthquake to astonish you."

"But you attached, and Miss Reynolds also, and not with each other—what but wretchedness can you expect in your marriage?"

"There you go cantering off with the bit between your teeth. Did I say that Miss Reynolds had a previous attachment? It is a likely way of accounting for her dejection; but she detests her present home, where she is a cypher, and may have no dislike to exchange it for one where she will be at the head of affairs. This prospect, however, does not diminish her grief, whatever it is, and she is not politic enough to profess any regard for me."

"And you feel none for her?" said Leonard.

"Not a jot!" returned Courtenay, almost fiercely.

A pause ensued, during which Leonard was too agitated to speak. All the reasons which he had meant to urge against the marriage seemed to have melted away before the matter-of-fact statements of his friend.

"What a fate!" said he, at last, "with her beauty, her grace, to give her hand to a man who does not love her."

"The fate of a coquette," returned his friend; "she has outraged all the beauty and the delicacy of love, she has her reward!"

This being rather in the form of a sentiment, surprised Leonard as coming from Mr. Courtenay.

"Still," said he, looking bewildered, "though I begin to understand *her* reasons for not opposing the marriage——"

"You can't make out mine—don't puzzle yourself; I'll tell you. I want a home, my father is always boring me to marry—I admire Miss Reynolds; and moreover I once threatened to make her accept me, if she ever tried to attract me. There is some triumph in that. Remember O'Neill. Take my advice and do the same. Marry your hard-headed woman."

"Never," said Leonard. "But I cannot get over the idea of your being so much in love with some one else. You who always laugh at such things in other people."

"Should I laugh at such things the less because I am subject to them? On my word, I can imagine nothing more absurd than my present conduct. I marry a woman for whom I have no sort of regard, to satisfy my father, and to stop the mouths of a couple of maiden aunts who write to me every fortnight, and entreat me to consider that I am the last descendant of the Courtenays. And I should have held it a kind of infidelity to the person to whom I am attached, if I had selected a woman whom I could by any possibility have become fond of. Very ridiculous all that."

"We are going out of our way," said Leonard, looking round; "there is the Roman arch."

"It is not far, let us walk there," said Courtenay, hastening in that direction. "This is a view I am particularly fond of—look—you get the water and the trees, and a bit of your house in the distance. I wish you would sketch it for me; I can't sketch, and I always wished for this view. Do it to-morrow."

"Well, I will; it would make a good picture," said Leonard. "Shall we go on now?"

Courtenay remained standing under the arch with his arms folded, looking on the ground and smiling as if he recollected something.

"I wonder how long it is since I was here," he said at last. "It must be two years, I should think."

"Well, are we going on?" asked Leonard, after they had stood for some moments silent.

"By all means," said Courtenay; "we both seem planet-struck to-day, I think."

When they arrived at Forrel Court, they found Maud in the library, standing reading at the shelves.

"Ah, Maud!" said Leonard, hastening up to her, "how did you get over?"

"Papa dropped me," returned Maud; "he is gone a little farther to call on an old patient. He will pick me up as he comes back."

"Have you seen Mr. Courtenay?" said Leonard, moving aside.

Maud coloured beautifully—Courtenay advanced to her. "Why don't you come and keep your brother's house?" said he, "such an old bachelor as he is."

"Oh! Mr. Courtenay," said Maud gaily, "I am a very valuable person; I cannot be spared to keep Leonard's house; he must find somebody else to do it."

"It is very hard that you and my father don't live here," said Leonard; "it is absurd to keep up two houses, and answers no purpose."

"Since there are not two Miss Warrennes," said Courtenay, turning to Maud.

"And it is so very hard, and so very unreasonable," said Maud, "not to give him credit for having made up his mind at twenty-two to remain single for ever and ever!"

"And as soon as you had fairly got rid of your other house, and settled in this," said Courtenay, "he would be sure to meet the very person who alone would have power to shake his resolution."

"Exactly!" replied Maud, laughing. "Don't look so vexed, Leonard dear, and please give me some luncheon."

"The very thing I have been asking for, Miss Warrenne; but he would not listen to me!"

"I suppose it is ready in the dining-room," said Leonard.

Courtenay offered his arm to Maud.

"How is Miss Reynolds?" asked Maud, as they took their seats at the table; "Mrs. Creswick told me she had returned in bad health."

"Yes; she seems to have a cough," said Courtenay. "Why is it you never come to see her?"

"Because my acquaintance was really with the Creswicks, and not with her. I only knew her as belonging to that house."

"I don't think she is popular with women," said Courtenay, coolly.

"No," replied Maud, with a gay laugh; "she is far too handsome!"

"Very much gone off lately, don't you think, Leonard?" said Courtenay, cutting a piece of bread as he spoke.

Maud looked at him with the most unbounded astonishment that could be put into a face. Leonard only sighed. Courtenay gave Maud one of his keen looks, but took no notice of her expression.

He could not fail to perceive that she had gained in looks since he saw her last. The outline of her beautiful features, sharpened more delicately, her expression even more joyous, more animated, her complexion more brilliant, her silken hair more abundant. She was so perfectly happy. Happy to see Alice so delightfully married; happy in Leonard's good fortune; happy to be so absolutely essential to her father every hour. When in repose it seemed as if no cloud could

ever have passed over her serene brow; when animated, nothing could be imagined so joyous as the sudden kindling of her whole countenance.

"Still a water-drinker?" said Leonard, as Courtenay filled his glass.

"Constant; you see, I am so excitable I dare not drink wine."

Maud again broke into a merry laugh.

"You don't believe me, Miss Warrenne; you always had a bad opinion of me."

"No," said Maud; "I don't like some of your ways; but I cannot fail to have a high opinion of you in general—I used once to hate you amazingly."

"I know; that evening at the Creswicks."

"Oh! All that time when you behaved badly to Leonard."

She wished it unsaid, when it was too late. He turned quickly round and gazed at her with an earnestness that brought the colour to her face; then, rising, he said to Leonard:

"Don't forget to do that view for me. I must have it."

"No; Maud shall sketch it," said Leonard. "I never like the bore of doing the outline."

"What view?" said Maud.

"The Roman arch," replied Courtenay.

Maud felt a kind of uneasiness that she tried to shake off.

"You must exert yourself," she said to Leonard; "I am going home directly, you know."

"No; stay till Sunday, and I will drive you back after church," cried Leonard.

"Do," said Courtenay.

"I daresay, Mr. Courtenay," replied Maud with another laugh; "I will stay for Leonard; but really you should not try *now*, to exert your influence over ladies. You can't think how persuasive you looked!"

Courtenay wrung her hand.

"What an odd person your friend is, Leonard," said Maud, still laughing; "he has almost crushed my fingers. Will you come and see if there is a bit of azalea left upon the lawn?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

Until the children were sent to bed of an evening at Heathfield, Mr. Courtenay found plenty of occupation in teasing them or playing with them. He was a great favourite with Mrs. Reynolds, because it was easy to see that his interest for them was not put on; but that really

he had much more pleasure in talking to them than to anyone else in the house. It was a never-failing source of interest to him, to watch what they would do, or to ask them all sorts of odd questions to see what they would say.

And when they were gone to bed and that occupation was withdrawn from him, Mr. Reynolds was quite satisfied with the degree of attention he paid to Florence, which consisted in once or twice coming up to her embroidery frame and remarking on the small progress she had made.

"You would never gain a living, Miss Reynolds, by embroidering; I don't remember the beginning of that cluster of violets, and I can hardly look forward to the end; I think you have accomplished half that leaf since I have been at Heathfield."

"No," said Florence, in a smothered tone, "I am very helpless, I fear."

"It is fortunate," said her father, "for you and for many other young ladies, that you have no necessity for exertion."

"I think," said Florence, looking up with more animation than she usually displayed—"I think I could be a governess."

"Oh, my dear Florence," said Mrs. Reynolds, from the depths of her arm-chair, "that would be worse than anything. I think, do you know, that *I* should prefer being a lady's-maid in a house where there were no girls. I fancy I could manage *one* mistress perfectly well. Don't you think, Mr. Courtenay, that would be a very easy life?"

"Pardon me," replied Courtenay, "I have a very slight experience of the sex; but I should think that to study the caprices of any one lady a sufficiently arduous task."

Mr. Reynolds laughed harshly; Florence looked timidly from her father to her lover as if she asked herself which was the sternest; but meeting the keen gaze of Courtenay fixed upon her, she bent down her head, and searched among the silks in her basket.

"What a remarkably handsome young man Mr. Warrenne-Digby is," said Mrs. Reynolds. "I was so pleased with him; he called on you to-day, my dear."

"I wish I had been at home," said Mr. Reynolds.

"He has the most splendid eyes," continued Mrs. Reynolds; "and he comes into a room so well. Isn't he delightful, Mr. Courtenay? Your pretty cousin was right when she called him romantic. I was thinking this morning how nicely he would do for Ada."

"So I think," said Courtenay.

Florence shivered.

"I wish Lucy were old enough; I would certainly try and catch him for her," said Mrs. Reynolds.

"You would do very wisely," replied Mr. Courtenay.

Mr. Reynolds, who was walking up and down the room, laughed and stopped opposite to his wife's chair.

"What, are you beginning already?" said he.

"Yes; I don't conceal it," said she; "it is the duty of every mother. Lucy is seven, and Mr. Warrenne Digby is——"

"Twenty-two," interposed Mr. Courtenay.

"Why, there, you see, one often hears of much greater disparity than that!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds. "I am sure in India twenty years is a very common difference; and here is but fifteen."

"I shall tell him," said Courtenay, joining in the laugh.

"Why did you not ask him to dinner?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"I did."

"And was he engaged?"

"He said so; but I don't know whether it was merely an excuse."

"No; his sister was there when he returned; I daresay he expected her," said Courtenay.

"His sister—delightful! I will have her to stay here!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds.

"She is only with him till Sunday," said Mr. Courtenay.

"Then she had better come on to us. I will go over to-morrow and settle it with her," said Mrs. Reynolds.

"Fancy that little blind thing being married," said Courtenay.

"What a chance! How thankful she ought to be," said Mrs. Reynolds.

"We have all of us much to be thankful for," remarked Mr. Reynolds, glancing at his daughter's dispirited countenance.

"That we have indeed," said Mrs. Reynolds arranging her emerald bracelet.

"Did you ride to-day?" said Mr. Reynolds, pausing as he passed his daughter in his walk.

"No."

"Nor walk?"

"No—I——"

"It is important to take exercise," said Mr. Reynolds; "you are now in the country—you have a horse at your command—I should be glad to see you a little more active in your habits."

"Florence is not strong," interposed Mrs. Reynolds; "trust her for showing off her pretty chestnut as soon as she feels able. If I were you, Florence dear, I should wish them all good-night; papa is cross this evening."

Nothing Mrs. Reynolds could say ever offended her husband. He stood smiling down upon her, while Courtenay lighted a candle for Florence, and quietly opened the door for her exit.

Mrs. Reynolds now and then felt some anxiety about the reality of Courtenay's regard for Florence. She had sufficient kindness of feeling to let this thought disturb her sometimes, but she consoled herself by remembering that young ladies *must* marry, and that this match presented an unusual number of advantages. On the only occasion upon which she had hinted her suspicions to Mr. Reynolds,

he had replied with as much harshness as he ever permitted himself to use to her. He was too contented to find any one willing to claim the hand of Florence after the character she had managed to fasten to herself, to admit of his being very fastidious respecting the degree of enthusiasm she might awaken. From all he knew of Mr. Courtenay he should feel pride in calling him his son-in-law, and nothing would cause him so much displeasure as any show of reluctance on the part of his daughter. Mrs. Reynolds was quite silenced.

It was always an awful time for Florence after breakfast, when the ladies went into Mrs. Reynolds's morning-room, where Courtenay sat with his book and Florence with her work-frame, and Mrs. Reynolds went off to meet her housekeeper, and play with her children, and try on all the new dresses that were being "built," as Courtenay called it, under her inspection.

And Florence, with her father's injunctions still ringing in her ears, dared not be uncivil, but sat ready to look up and reply whenever Courtenay should please to speak, and she became so nervous while waiting for the sound of his voice that she always started when he began, which as he remarked to himself, was "highly gratifying."

On this morning there was a silence of some minutes, while Courtenay followed the pattern of the carpet with a slender mahl-stick that he had taken from an easel near. At last he came out of his reverie.

"Will you ride this morning?" he asked

"I think—I—had rather not."

"What will you like to do?"

"I believe I should like to do nothing; but I do not know whether——"

"Whether it is best for you. Let me advise you to drive out; there is nothing very fatiguing in sitting in a carriage."

"Yes; I will take your advice," said Florence.

"I wonder whether all this obedience is meant to last," thought Courtenay.

"Well, then, shall I order the pony-carriage after luncheon?" he asked.

"If you please."

After this the lovers found nothing to say to each other for a long time. Florence sorted the colours of her silks; Courtenay drew all the roses within his reach on the carpet.

"Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay at last, suddenly approaching his chair nearer to hers.

He made a pause that frightened her. She laid down her work and looked at him.

"Miss Reynolds, when will you do me the honour to name a day for our marriage?"

She stretched out her hands with the look of terror that he had once or twice seen in Alice Scudamore.

"I entreat you—give me—a little—time," she faltered, trembling from head to foot. Then as fast as she could, she added:

"Only, if it interferes with your arrangements. I do not know what your engagements may be—I mean if it does not inconvenience you greatly—to wait—"

"Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, with more gravity than was habitual to him, "I can have no arrangements at the present time that are not subservient to your wishes. I should be sorry to hasten your movements, or to occasion you any uneasiness. But I leave you to judge the sort of impression your father will have of my respect for yourself and his alliance if I constantly agree to defer the period of our union."

"Oh, Mr. Courtenay!" said Florence, gazing into his face with an expression of wild anxiety, "I know nothing of you!"

"It is true," said Courtenay, still gravely, and without any expression of irony; "but allow me to ask if it is my fault? Have you ever invited my confidence? Have you ever allowed me to seek to be on more intimate terms with you? At any rate, I have attempted no concealment, and it is possible that what you do know of me may be my worst side."

"You re-assure me; you give me some courage," said Florence; "you lead me to hope something from your generosity."

She paused as if to take a strong resolution, and then added, "In this engagement I am influenced by fear alone."

"Is this true?" exclaimed Courtenay, bending forward and looking her through.

"When you made proposals to me through my father," said Florence, becoming crimson, "he informed me that if I refused to accept them, I should not receive the shelter of his roof—nay, if by any conduct of mine subsequently, you were induced to break with me, he would withdraw his protection from me. Have some compassion on me, Mr. Courtenay. Think for me!"

"And this is the simple truth?" said Courtenay.

"It is indeed!" said Florence, and covering her face, she burst into a passion of tears—more impetuous, more hysterical in fact, than anything he had ever seen.

No, though he often said it was one of his peculiarities to be not in the slightest degree affected by a woman's tears, there were few things which made him so exceedingly wretched. He was overcome directly.

"Miss Reynolds," he began—"Florence, let me entreat you to compose yourself. You ask me to think for you. How *can* I think, when—it's very odd—when you actually agitate me by your distress!"

But it was some time before she could compose herself; her nerves were shaken and her health weak, and as she was not in the habit of giving way to tears, the paroxysm was all the stronger when it did come.

"And now listen," said Courtenay; "try to think dispassionately of your situation. Suppose I withdraw my suit, what will be your condition? On my word, I don't see how that will mend matters for you. Mr. Reynolds will be as much displeased as if the withdrawal came from your side. That is, if I understand you."

"It is true. What am I to do?" said Florence. She looked the very picture of helpless distress.

"Why," said Courtenay, leaning forward and speaking in his usual manner again, "I am aware that it is rather an awkward alternative to propose to you; but I really don't see what other move is open; your father has checkmated you. I am afraid you must marry me."

"Oh! don't, for heaven's sake! have more regard to yourself, more pride, than to seek a wife who has no heart to bestow! If all I hear of you be just, you deserve some affection!" exclaimed Florence, in the extremest agitation.

"You flatter me. I don't seem very likely to come by any at present," said Courtenay, smiling. "But may I inquire what are your special objections to the marriage?"

"Have I not told you? Must I repeat it? I love another," murmured Florence, struggling with her tears.

Courtenay shook his head with a slight smile.

"You do not believe me!" exclaimed Florence; "you cannot credit that I have loved this person for years, that I shall never cease to do so, that I little knew how much until my fate was fixed! Mr. Courtenay, have compassion upon me! With you all, this is the occupation of an hour; with me the misery of a life!"

"What a very dramatic position we are placed in!" said Courtenay, smiling. "But now consider. It is very romantic and pretty to talk of marrying one's first love, but it is not done. Then comes a marriage of convenience, such as ours. You will always be assured of my respect, you will have a large fortune; just turn it over in your mind."

"I cannot! I cannot! Do you not see that it is a crime?' exclaimed Florence.

Courtenay was struck with astonishment. It was so. There was no disputing the fact. And this girl whom he had despised, and considered as inferior in every way, had a more punctilious sense of duty than himself.

"You are quite right, Miss Reynolds; it must be prevented," said Courtenay, rising.

"But how? Just think of my father!"

"He must hear reason, like other people; shall I speak to him, or will you?"

"I? Oh! I should die of terror!"

"Dear me? And what if Mr. Reynolds should be unwilling to let you off?" asked Courtenay, preparing to leave the room.

"Oh, Mr. Courtenay, come back! It will not do! All my father's anger would fall on me! I dare not venture it!"

"But, in what way will it be possible for me to oblige you, if not in this?" said Courtenay, resuming his seat by her side. "If neither *you* nor *I* withdraw, it appears to me very probable that the marriage will take place."

"Oh, don't say so!" exclaimed Florence, with another burst of tears.

Courtenay twisted about the mahl-stick in silence; Florence had recourse to her salts.

"Really, I have every inclination to serve you," said he; "but I can't quite see my way; suppose I talk it over with Mrs. Reynolds?"

"Oh! do—go directly—thank you, a thousand times!"

Courtenay hastened into the garden, where at that hour Mrs. Reynolds was pretty sure to be found. Florence waited in suspense until his return.

He came back in about a quarter of an hour; sat down in the same chair that he had before occupied, and took her hand with an air of sympathy very unusual to him.

"I assure you, it won't do," he said. "Mrs. Reynolds gives you no hopes. She says Mr. Reynolds is more firmly fixed upon this subject than she could have imagined. I am very sorry for you. I would abscond if I could do so without losing my character. I wish you would try and reconcile yourself to the business. I like you better than I ever thought I should."

"You won't hurry me then?" said Florence.

He did not quite understand the expression of her face, but he replied hastily:

"Not for worlds! And now let me drive you out; it will do you good, after all this excitement."

(*To be continued.*)

OF WISE BOLDNESS.

NOTHING is more pitiable than foolhardiness, nothing more commendable than timely boldness. We have already quoted the wise saying that "half the failures in life arise from pulling in one's horse as he is leaping;" and scarce anything could be more true.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts too small,
Who dare not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all."

There come moments in every man's life when all depends on the action of the moment. Shakespeare knew this well, and has said some of the very finest things on the subject. To quote them in sufficient number to do Shakespeare justice were in this place impossible. But all remember the words of Macbeth:

"I dare do all that may become a man,
Who dares do more is none."

Words which, we take it, might form the motto for wise boldness. But long before Shakespeare the truth was seized and expressed. Homer says:—

"Fear not, but be bold:
A decent boldness ever meets with friends,
Succeeds, and even a stranger recommends."

And the Greek poet only felt and expressed what Mahomet meant when he said, "Paradise lies under the points of our swords."

Lord Bacon has uttered some very apt words on boldness in his Essay:

"Boldness is ever blind, for it seeth not dangers and inconveniences; therefore it is ill in counsel, good in execution; so that the right use of bold persons is that they never command in chief, but be under the direction of others. For in counsel it is good to see dangers, and in execution not to see them, unless they be very great."

But in the last resort a man must ever be his own counsellor; and it is well that execution should not be hampered by doubts and surmises. Quarles has also some wise words, to which we may well listen: "Fear nothing but what thy industry may prevent; be confident of nothing but what fortune cannot defeat: it is no less folly to fear what is impossible to be avoided, than to be secure when there is a possibility to be deprived."

Cowley has some very good lines on this subject:

"Begin, be bold, and venture to be wise,
He who defers this work from day to day,
Does on a river's bank expecting stay
Till the whole stream, which stopped him, should begone,
That runs, and as it runs, for ever will run on."

Sir Walter Scott's Wamba in "Ivanhoe" speaks thus :—

"Wit, Sir Knight, may do much; he is a quick, apprehensive knave who sees his neighbour's blind side, and knows how to keep the lee-gage, when his passions are blowing high. But boldness is a sturdy fellow that makes all split. He rows against wind and tide, and makes way notwithstanding."

Guicciardini, in his Maxims, sets down the following, which is certainly not unworthy to appear here :—

"One who knows that he is fortune's darling may dart forward upon adventures with the bolder heart; yet it is to be heeded, that fortune is not only various, according to the nature of times and seasons, but also, at the same time, is various in the nature of the thing; for he who narrowly observes will see by experience many men to be fortunate in one kind of thing and unfortunate in another. And I, in mine own part, have had until this February 3rd, 1523, prospering fortune in many things; *tamen*, it is not so with me in the riches or honour which I seek to obtain, because seeking them not, they do of their own nature follow after me, but when I begin to seek them they seem to forsake me."

A. H. Japp, LL.D.

GIFTS.

I bear the badge of honour on my breast,
The flaming sword of duty in my hand,
Upon my brow the crowns of victory rest—
Upon my lips the accent of command.

The stars of Heaven in their courses fight
For him who holds aloft the flag of truth;
For him there rise no blinding mists of night—
To him swift years retain immortal youth.

These gifts—not mine, but Fortune's, showered on me,
Are mostly dear for thy sake, O my sweet!
All that my life has won I offer thee,
My laurels fall before thy passing feet.

C. E. Meetkerke.

A CHANCE MEETING.

THE Manchester Express was just due out from Euston, and Arthur Burton, to his intense satisfaction, was the sole occupant of a "third smoking." He had placed his open bag on the seat beside him, in which was packed a great store of such literature as his soul delighted in, and he felt comfortably assured that he had left neither pipe, tobacco, nor matches behind.

He felt, therefore, almost aggrieved when the door was burst open by an energetic porter bearing the impedimenta of a young gentleman in an ulster.

The new passenger stood for some time arranging his belongings on the rack, and it was not until he had seated himself and unfolded a newspaper, that Burton caught sight of his face.

The other happened to look up at the same moment, and their eyes met. The casual look on either face passed swiftly into one of surprised recognition. Both spoke.

"Langford!"

"Burton!"

"Whoever would have thought of knocking against you like this?"

"Why, Burton, what have you been doing all this time? No one has heard a word from you since you left, two years ago."

"I have been up in town ever since. How are all they getting on at Ludford?"

Then followed numerous inquiries and the exchange of much interesting information. To Burton, Ludford was not without interest of a painful sort. There resided the young lady whose views were not in strict accordance with his own as to the disposal of her future, and Langford was her cousin.

"I suppose you are going straight back to Ludford now," he remarked, his heart full of an indefinable yearning.

"Oh, no! I've got to go on to Manchester about a case, and I would give anything to be home for to-morrow evening."

"Anything up?"

"Yes. They are giving a big tennis party, and a dance after, and——"

"Mary Graham will be there?"

Burton had not entirely forgotten the much he had seen, and the more he had surmised, two years ago at Ludford.

"Well, yes, she'll be there I have no doubt." His tone was one of perfect indifference, but he blushed slightly, and after a pause inquired: "And what have you been doing that way, Burton?"

The latter shook his head and smiled. "Nothing. Not in my line!"

"Well, you know," Langford remarked in the tone of one to whom the idea of a rival suggested no terrors, "I thought you were a little gone on Mary once yourself, or on Dora Wynne. You did not seem to be able to make up your mind between them."

Burton experienced a strange shock when he heard this young lady's name, although he had been anxiously listening for it.

"Thought Miss Wynne was married, or going to be married, or something," he remarked with indifference.

"Married! She is not even engaged."

"Not to Young, that fellow at the Brewery?"

Langford lit his pipe. The necessary pauses for puffing invested his reply with an irritating deliberateness.

"Oh no, there never was anything there. She did not care a brass farthing for him. Not her form. I fancy Browne is very much gone on her, though. You remember Browne out at Gorham—rattling good sort. He'll pull it off too, I'll wager any money."

Burton lit up also.

"Is Miss Wynne at Ludford now?"

"Yes. She'll be there to-morrow afternoon. By-the-bye, where are you making for?"

"I am thinking of spending a few days with my sister at Buxton, and going on to Liverpool on Monday."

"Why not look them up at Ludford?"

Burton changed colour.

"I scarcely like to. I have been so ungrateful—not written to a soul there since I left."

"Oh, stuff! Look here. Run over for this dance. They would be very glad to see you—that I'll answer for. They are short of men too."

"I don't doubt their kindness at all," he said, unwilling to appear too open to persuasion, "but——"

"Nonsense! there are no 'buts.' I'll send a wire to my mother from Rugby, and that will settle it. You can go to Buxton to-night and catch the 10.27 to-morrow morning. Yes," referring to a Bradshaw, "that's the train."

Even had he wished not to go, it would have been difficult to refuse this masterful young man.

So the matter was settled. The telegram was sent, and at one o'clock next day Burton arrived at Ludford.

Two years before he had brought a sojourn of double that period to a rather abrupt termination. Since then he had frequently sworn that his shadow should never darken its streets again—a fact which troubled his conscience now not at all.

Having deposited his luggage at the hotel, he went and called on Mrs. Langford. On the occasion of his last visit to that house had happened the event which had cast a sombre shadow over the last two years of his life. There he had failed in an enterprise in which a

less conscientious man might have succeeded. In declaring his love to Miss Wynne he had kept the secondary object too steadily before his eyes, of allowing her to form no wrong estimate as to his means; and in after days, when he recalled every word that had passed between them, the honesty of his intentions in no way consoled him for his deplorable want of tact. Like a finger-mark on a razor-blade, invisible till breathed upon—depression of spirits always brought this episode before his mind with exaggerated distinctness. In those moments he could see that the question had not been decided on the merits of the case—a conviction which fatally affected his repeated resolutions to root up his love.

On his way down the drive he observed with a shock two hammock-chairs beneath a large lilac-tree on the lawn, to the right of the conservatory. That was the identical spot where he had managed things so badly. It seemed as if those two chairs had been there ever since, and as the different objects around him all appeared bent on proclaiming their connection with that crisis of his life, he fell to wondering why he had exposed himself to the bitterness of seeing her accept the attentions of another man.

Burton's share in the tennis-party consisted principally in renewing old acquaintances, and in answering and making inquiries—intellectual exercises which fell upon one half of his intelligence only, the other being absorbed in scrutinising the shifting groups of people, and in listening to the conversations going on about him, in the hope of gaining some intelligence of Miss Wynne.

The sickening conviction that he was not to see her had begun to force itself upon him, when he heard Mrs. Langford address that question to a group of players, just returned from playing a set, which a hostess, being impelled thereto by politeness rather than an earnest desire for information, frequently asks at tennis-parties.

"And which side won?"

"It was a very close game, auntie, and we just managed to win it—thanks to the sun."

Burton turned suddenly at the sound of that voice, whose every tone and modulation had lived like haunting music in his mind for two years.

She came forward without the slightest embarrassment and held out her hand.

"So you have come to look us up again at Ludford, Mr. Burton?"

He stammered out some common-place reply—of the easy self-possessed manner he had so carefully rehearsed in anticipation of this meeting there was no sign.

But conversation was out of the question just then, for Mrs. Langford interrupted with:

"Dora, my dear, I think you had better play a return set. Mr. Browne was your partner, I think."

He had not noticed Browne, and it was not until he saw Dora walk

away, evidently well pleased with her partner, that he realised how intensely he disliked him. There was something offensive in his very walk, and the familiarity of his address filled him with honest indignation. He could not, however, deny himself the misery of going down to watch the game. The understanding between Dora and her partner was evidently perfect, and as he gloomily watched them he bitterly repented of his folly in coming to Ludford.

Miss Wynne was about twenty-five, and might with justice be described as a very handsome girl. Her finely-chiselled features were haunted in repose by a suggestion of sadness, which lent a wonderful sweetness to her smile. A face and promise of disposition irresistibly attractive to a man so shy and reserved as Burton. But watching her then, and later when tea was being served under the trees, he was filled with a bitter sense of her fitness and unparalleled loveliness, which increased in proportion as he realised that, as far as he was concerned, she might be the plainest among women.

A dance to be absolutely successful in the summer-time should be given in a house which is supplemented by a large garden with shady gravelled walks. This detail was not lacking at Mrs. Langford's, and the intervals between the dances were not unreasonably short.

Burton had asked Miss Wynne for two dances, and the willingness with which she had given them had cankered his enjoyment of the rest of the programme, by convincing him that if he had asked for another he would have got that also.

They danced the first almost to the end, the larger share of the conversation fell upon Burton, and he found it no easy matter to achieve indifferent small-talk with a young lady whose interest he had once attempted to arouse in affairs of greater importance. Before the ice had been broken to any appreciable extent, the music for the next dance commenced, and angry with himself only one degree less than with his partner, he conducted her to her chaperon. Her next dance was with Browne, and the pleasure she seemed to find in that gentleman's company afforded him food for meditation.

At last his turn came to claim her for their second dance.

"Do you particularly wish to dance this?" he asked, assuming that tone of indifference which is intensified by a dash of kindliness. "It's rather hot, and I expect you are a little tired."

"No, I am not tired. But just as you please, Mr. Burton."

He was so piqued by her manner, which after all was probably only a successful imitation of his own, that he felt tempted to dance the waltz through and trouble himself no further. But suddenly remembering that what he did now concerned not so much the present and its passing moods, as the future and its abiding condemnation, he mastered the impulse and conducted her to the conservatory. There, however, every seat was occupied, and many whispers sounded in the fragrant gloom like a silvery waterfall.

"Shall we go out on the lawn? It is not at all cold."

He noticed, not without misgiving, that the two hammock-chairs were still beneath the lilac-tree and unoccupied. He wondered to what extent it was an omen that the disagreeable part of his history was about to repeat itself.

"Better sit here," he said nervously. Her manner of unquestioning obedience in this small thing, which might have acted as the subtlest flattery at another time, almost offended him now.

The shadows of the trees, cast by the moon on the far end of the lawn, were as clearly defined as if a stream of ink had been run over the grass. The colours of the flowers in the borders were perfectly distinct, and the stillness of the leaves, in particular of the taller varieties of flowers, was strangely suggestive of sleep. Seated there, these two were wrapped in, and almost absorbed by, mellow silence, and the distant dance-music seemed as much out of place as do the tawdry decorations of a shrine in a continental cathedral.

Miss Wynne sat inclined slightly forward, her hands folded over the fan on her lap. Her profile was clearly marked against the sky and he wondered what expression it wore. The fact that her upper and lower lips met in natural and gentle contact, seemed to imply that, at all events, it was not one of suspicion or watchfulness.

"It is just two years since I was last here," he said musingly.

"So long as that? But I suppose it seems a very short time to you."

"On the contrary, it seems very long indeed."

Just then two figures emerged from the shadows, at the end of the lawn, and passed in front of them. One was Browne, the other a skittish spinster who had steered clear of the shoals of matrimony and gained those calm seas of Unexpectancy, in which the discovery is made that an Epicurean spinsterhood is not without its charms.

The two were laughing uproariously over some joke, and Burton, who was not particularly pleased at the apparition of his rival just then, could not help feeling somewhat newly disappointed that Browne and his partner were beyond all suspicion of flirtation.

Miss Wynne turned slightly and watched the couple enter the conservatory.

"Browne seems to be quite happy this evening."

"Yes," she replied smiling; "he has good cause to be."

Burton knew it was coming now, and nerved himself up to ask the obvious question. Her face was turned towards him, the profile no longer visible against the sky.

"Indeed," he said slowly, "what has happened?"

She laughed quietly and, leaning forward, tapped the head of a sleeping daisy with her fan.

"We don't want it to be known yet, but as you are going away to-morrow you won't have time to tell any one." She regarded him earnestly, and he, conscious that he was growing pale, drew a low-

lying branch of lilac towards him, and shaded his eyes with the leaves. "He has just got engaged."

He heard his doom in silence. It was beyond all human possibility to reply directly.

"Let me see," he said after awhile, with a feeble attempt at gaiety "what is expected of me—in the way of congratulations, I mean?"

"I don't know what men say under such circumstances. Treat each other with silent contempt, probably, if what they say about matrimony is what they really think!"

As Burton did not contemplate congratulating Browne, the information seemed somewhat irrelevant.

"I mean, what should one say to you?"

"I don't know," she replied, "except perhaps congratulate me on the artful way I have managed the business."

Burton was startled by this extreme frankness. Strangely enough she seemed, from the contemplative smile on her face, not at all indisposed to give him full particulars.

"What was the difficulty?" he inquired.

"Oh, with papa, of course. He would not hear of it at first."

Just then the music of the next dance struck up. She did not seem to notice it. "Perhaps," he thought, "she has no partner for this one, and I shall hear all the ghastly details of the courtship!"

"What was the objection?" he asked languidly, allowing the lilac branch to swing back again.

"Too young."

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "And when is a girl to be old enough to think for herself in these matters?"

"Oh, I daresay it was all right! He did not want anything of the sort to happen while she was at Newnham. She is only——"

"Who are you talking about?" he demanded hastily.

"Why, my sister Mabel, to be sure. Who did you suppose?"

Burton's heart gave a wild throb. "I—I thought it was somebody else," he said, scarcely able to conceal the fact that he was trembling in every limb. He experienced rather a sense of relief from pressing danger than any hope or joy on his own account, for he knew only too well that he was no nearer winning her than he was two years ago.

"The next dance has begun, I think," she said, rising with superb indifference to the fact that it was nearly half over. She bent over her programme critically, and Burton noticed that the effect of the moonlight on her hair was to surround her head with a faint golden radiance.

"I have a partner, it seems, but I can't quite make out who. You had better take me in."

Burton took the programme and examined it.

"Neither can I," he said, returning it and offering her his arm. He did not, however, make for the conservatory, which was now empty.

"How beautiful the night is!" he said, for the first time seeming to realise that fact. He led her slowly down the walk, but paused at the head of a little shady path which branched off amongst the trees. Then, without further parley, he turned into the scented, leafy tunnel, and soon reached a clear space in the depth of the shrubbery where the green turf was smoothly shaven, and many roses bloomed. Again they were in the moonlight, their positions now reversed, so enabling him to see her face plainly.

"I think," he said, stopping, "I shall be able to congratulate Browne after all. I did not feel at all inclined to do so just now."

"Why not?" The question was asked in a tone of amused wonderment. She seemed, however, to have inhaled more air than was actually necessary for articulation, for the query finished off with a little flutter.

His voice, also, was scarcely under control, and he would not trust himself to look her straight in the face as he replied:

"Because I thought it was to you he was engaged. If that had been the case I think I should not—not have been able to congratulate him."

"Well, Mr. Burton"—assuming an air of pretty indignation—"that's not saying very much for me."

"Oh, Dora," he cried, his passion sweeping him out of his depth, and his words possessed no longer of either an experimental or probing value, "don't you know what I mean?"

She did not reply, and he, fearful of interruption before his tale should be half told, hurried on to save himself from all the despair and darkness "no" meant for him, with the breathless haste of a settler galloping for dear life from the pursuing flame and darkness of a bush-fire.

"I think I should have gone mad. Of course my being here this evening is chance in a sort of way; but do you think a dance of itself was sufficient to bring me? Miss Wynne, perhaps I am troubling you. I will take you into the house."

He half turned; but her hand slipped from his arm. Almost sadly she pressed it on her bosom as if to conceal her agitation, and looked at his face but not into his eyes.

"Two years ago," he continued, "I told you, or tried to tell you, that I loved you. Then I went away. It seemed to be the right thing to try and efface your memory from my heart; but I have failed—failed utterly—partly because I always think—and the thought has added to my misery—that I, myself, put your answer into your mouth that evening—that, in fact, only one reply was possible to you."

She remained strangely impassive. He took a step nearer and glanced furtively at her face. Behind and around them were roses, and the air was full of their fragrance. "In this garden of roses," he said, his voice quivering with suppressed excitement, and stretching

out his hand towards her, "is the fairest rose amongst them all to be mine?"

A pause followed this speech—an eloquent silence during which, by strange wizardry, the whole world was changed for him. The conviction that the battle was won filled him with joy—all the more intense, perhaps, because as yet he had received not the slightest intimation of it by speech. Quite unconsciously he got possession of her hand; at the touch their eyes met, and a blush, rivalling that of the most beautiful of the roses, suffused her throat and face.

"Dora, my darling," he whispered very gently, drawing her towards him, "have those two years been absolutely wasted, then?"

"Perhaps it was my fault," she said, with a little catch in her voice, as his arms closed round her; "and then you went away so soon after."

Her head sank on his bosom, and he bent down to her—there alone with the roses and the green grass, the golden moon looking down indifferently on all. Yet such joy as was theirs just then comes but seldom in a lifetime. Perhaps not twice. To some never.

"Were you not surprised to see me this afternoon?" he asked presently, when they had been wandering some time about that transformed rose-garden.

"No, not at all," she said, laughing and blushing.

"Not at all! Why?"

She glanced at his face questioningly, as if to assure herself that she might venture to make a confidence which should reveal much to him.

"Auntie sent the telegram, saying that you were coming, over to me at once," she said. "And now you really must take me in. I wonder which dance is on?"

But such a confidence as that had to be sealed in a fitting manner before he could comply with her request.

THE PYRAMIDS "AT HOME."

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc., etc.

A Maiden of Cairo.

IT was very difficult to leave all the magic of the Pyramids by moonlight; the solemn silence and solitude of the vast surrounding plains; the beauty of the heavens with their countless, moving stars, over which the Queen of Night seemed to reign with such soft and subtle influence: very difficult to turn away from the contemplation of a scene in which the elements seemed more of heaven than of earth, and come back to the trivial and the commonplace. But we could not stay here for ever: and we presently found ourselves standing on the sandy terrace between the Pyramids and the Mena House Hotel.

The small hours had long struck; we were absolutely alone; every one had retired, and probably many were dreaming of the morrow, picnics, evening dances and mild flirtations. What to them the moonlit Pyramids, the mysterious Sphinx, the sacred atmosphere of antiquity—sacred as we hold the dead sacred, and possessing all the repose and solemnity of death? Such influences were as a lost language to the sleepers—who in their way perhaps were none the less happy. Those to whom the higher senses are given, have too often to pay for the privilege by infinite sorrow and suffering, in which the intervals of happiness play a very small part.

The hotel was wrapped in silence. The door stood open—house-

breakers and highwaymen are unknown in these latitudes, or if known, do their work boldly and openly. A sleepy porter, whose office was a sinecure, reposed in a huge chair and scarcely opened his eyes to give a smile all pity and sarcasm to the singular Englishmen who preferred moonlit Pyramids, a mysterious Sphinx and desolate plains to a comfortable bed and easy slumbers. The electric lights were extinguished, but here and there a ruby lamp threw its warm glow over the scene: very warm after the pale moon which had guided our steps and thrown our dark shadows over the sandy plains. Up the wide staircase we went to our respective rooms, where from our own window—as fate would have it—we could still look out upon the moonlit outlines of the Great Pyramid, whose very shadow almost touched us. Alone as we now were, the grandeur and solemnity, the almost appalling silence and solitude of the whole scene was immeasurably heightened.

From the open window, the influence of these mighty structures more than ever enfolded us. There was no thought of bed and rest, slumbers and dreams: all one's bodily needs retired before this divine night. It was so clear that a small object would have stood out boldly on the outlines of the Pyramids, but those outlines were unbroken; no desecrating foot rested upon them; no earthly sound broke that eternal silence. If they were haunted, it was only by ghosts and shades invisible to mortal eye.

All the mystery and speculation that has enshrouded them as countless ages have rolled on, seemed prominently before us to-night.

We remembered how, from all times, excepting the very earliest, there had been conjectures as to their destiny. By some speculative thinkers—such as Jomard—the Great Pyramid was supposed to have been built solely for scientific uses. Gazing far down the interior passage towards the opening, the eye rested at night on the Polar Star of the ancients—not our Polar Star of to-day. Thus it was supposed to serve an astronomical purpose. In the sarcophagus of the tomb-chamber Piazzi Smyth considered that he saw a standard authority on the weights and measures of Ancient Egypt: and in "Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid," he has worked this fancy out with great ingenuity, but without sufficient proof. Like almost all suppositions connected with the Pyramids his arguments are more theoretical than practical.

In ancient Arab legends it is recorded that the Pyramids were built before the Flood to preserve scientific treasures from destruction. Again, they were imagined to have been granaries built by Joseph, by those who knew not that they were almost solid erections. Some thought they were observatories and sundials, the hours marked, not on the flat surface but by shadows cast upon the sand: a poetical idea that would not bear looking into. Others supposed them watch-towers, lighted at night to guide travellers in crossing the desert: also poetical, but unneeded where the unchanging stars formed a truer

beacon. The desert plains were not a troubled sea with rocks ahead. By some it was thought that in their solemn and secret chambers priests were dedicated to their religion: and others even declared they were not the work of men's hands, but, like trees, had mysteriously grown up out of the earth.

The Second Pyramid, erected by Khafra or Chefren, is not generally climbed by travellers. Bedouins haunting the top of the Great Pyramid will offer to run down it and up the second in an impossibly short time for backsheesh; and will do it; but the ascent is difficult, and serves no purpose. It is smaller than the Great Pyramid, but the plateau being higher, it almost looks the larger of the two. The interior possesses the usual chambers and passages, but they are smaller than those of the Pyramid of Cheops. The sarcophagus of red granite in the tomb-chamber is larger than that of Cheops, and when found by Belzoni, contained the bones of an ox. No doubt Chefren had once reposed here, and why his body was not left in peace, remains amongst the eternal mysteries of earth.

This Belzoni was one of the most indefatigable and greatest of discoverers. His career was remarkable and romantic.

Born in 1778, son of a humble barber in Padua—that quiet but charming city—he was destined for the cloister. In Rome, brought up as a monk, he very soon distinguished himself. Then came the occupation of Rome by the French; he fled to England, and supported himself by sitting to artists as a model for Hercules and Apollo, for he was a man of great physical as well as mental strength.

Whilst in London, he also studied water-engineering, and renouncing all idea of returning to the cloister, took unto himself a wife in every way fitted to be his companion.

In 1815 they went to Egypt, where Belzoni supported himself by dancing in public. How such a man must have mistaken his vocation by dreaming of the cloister, with all its limitations! Here he attracted the notice of Mohammed Ali, with whom he soon became a favourite. Henceforth his days of poverty and uncertainty were at an end. He thoroughly justified the monarch's partiality, and began his exploring career by opening the Second Pyramid and discovering its hidden chambers and recesses. He discovered the tomb of Seti I. at Thebes, opened the Rock Temples of Abû Simbel, discovered the emerald mines of Sabara, which had been long lost, and the ruins of ancient Berenike on the Red Sea.

Belzoni died at the age of forty-five whilst on a journey into the interior of Africa: a journey that but for this untimely end would probably have led to great results. He was a man in advance of his time, and possessed unbounded energy and courage; his mental gifts were as stupendous as his stature was great; nothing daunted him. He was skilled as an engineer, though it never became his vocation, and his talent for drawing was remarkable. In his wife, he had a devoted help-meet, and from the day of his marriage to the day

At the Foot of the Pyramids.

of his death, they were scarcely ever separated. Her own mental qualities were of a high order, enabling her to enter into and comprehend all her husband's thoughts and aspirations. She became as great an enthusiast as himself in all his labours and explorings; and after his death edited such of his valuable works as were yet unpublished.

It is pleasant to contemplate careers so successful; the lives of two beings well matched, working harmoniously together, devoted to each other. The contrary is so often the case in this world of cross purposes. But Belzoni was a man of immense, almost universal influence. All who came beneath it, yielded to his mesmeric power: of which the great secret was that allied to his mental gifts was the charm of sympathy, without any of the weakness that sometimes accompanies the virtue. His heart was always under the guidance of his reason. The Arabs thought him almost superhuman, and yielded a blind obedience to him. Had he been a monarch, he might have swayed the world. The only sad feature in his life was its shortness: he died with his mental powers at their highest, and when the greatest possibilities of his career were only developing.

But though to Belzoni belongs the honour of having opened the Second Pyramid, not to him belongs the honour of discovering the building or Temple near it, over which the Sphinx keeps watch and ward.

This was reserved for Mariette Pacha, after it had been buried 1000 years in the sand. And here in a well, as we have recorded, he also discovered eight statues of Chefren, the best of which is now in the Boulak museum; the hieroglyphics on the walls of the temple proving that the Egyptians of those days possessed the art of writing, and were already highly civilised. Over this temple, we have seen, the Sphinx presides with a silence never broken and a mystery never lifted. To the ancients it was the image of a god: the type of Har-em-Khu: Horus in the sun-rising: emblem of light conquering darkness, life rising out of death.

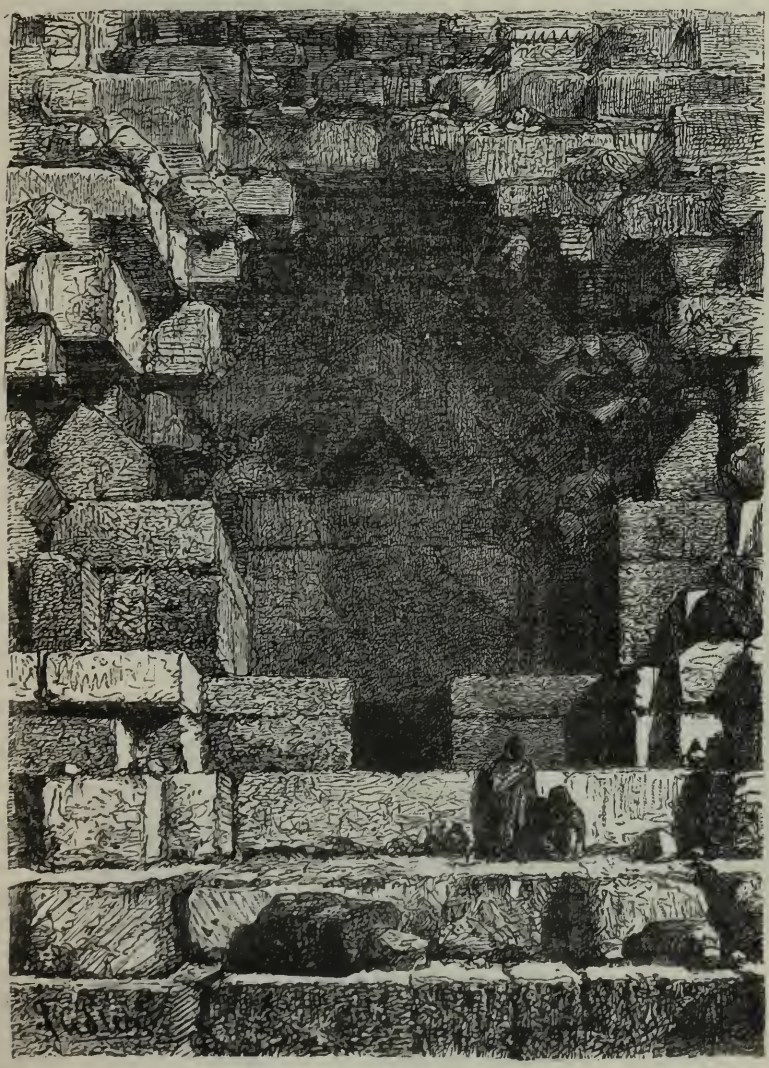
In the Necropolis Har-em-Khu was the emblem of the resurrection; at the sun-rising, he was light and life; overlooking the vast plains of the country, he represented fertility. His image, in the form of the Sphinx, the Egyptians called Hu, signifying *the watcher;* and never image more solemn, serene, full of calm force, could have been imagined by heathen people: a human head allied to the body of a lion: highest combination they could conceive of mental and physical power.

From the courts of the temple the worshippers would mount the steps, the grand form ever in sight, and perform their sacrificial rites on the altar that lay between its enormous paws. Here the incense ascended, lighted by a people groping in darkness, yet in much so nearly approaching the truth. How was it with them, when for each the Dark Valley was reached, and the great mystery became known?

There was no one to return from the dead and tell them what lay beyond the veil. Ages had to elapse before Moses and the Prophets arose; and again before St. Paul was to stand forth and declare to the men of Athens Him whom they ignorantly worshipped as the UNKNOWN GOD.

But to return to our Pyramids and the present time.

The moon has travelled far; the stars are waning: let us close the



ENTRANCE TO THE GREAT PYRAMID.

casement, for a short repose before Horus rises in the east, and a new day is born to earth.

The next morning it was not the same thing at all. Last night's romance had vanished and evaporated, "as a dream dies at the opening day." This garish light was an enemy to poetry and contemplation: quite as much as the small crowd thronging the steps of the hotel, the hall, the morning-room, the chatter of the breakfast-room;

those mild excitements consequent upon approaching excursions on donkeys or camels, in carriages or dahabeeyehs.

There was no repose anywhere. The Bedouins at the foot of the Great Pyramid were already on the alert for their daily victims, and the venerable Sheykh, imposing and dignified, who might have been one of the ancient patriarchs, invested them with great discretionary powers. True grandeur of face and form have some of these Egyptian sheykhs, and it is difficult to conceive that their lives are not equally free from the petty faults and greater vices which so often cloud the lives of mankind. For, "come sune or syne," a man's life, for good or evil, is reflected upon the countenance.

The terrace before the hotel was crowded with vehicles of every description, and luncheon-baskets were carefully stowed into invisible recesses. Some had planned to visit a distant pyramid, others an important ruin; others again to encamp for a day in the desert or to spend it amongst the reeds and rushes and lotus flowers of the Nile: all to reassemble towards sundown, the hour for the important ceremony of *table-d'hôte*.

"I invite you to inspect the interior of the Pyramids," said one of the managers to us, literally translating his French into English. "It is well worth a visit, and the experience is not in the least disagreeable. The whole does not occupy an hour. One moment! there goes Mohamet Ali—I will call him."

Without giving us time for an opinion, our active manager darted to the door and returned with the imposing Sheykh, whose presence seemed to fill the room, whose flowing garments folded and unfolded with grace as he walked, and whose voice was ringing and sonorous.

"Mohamet Ali," said the manager, "these gentlemen are desirous of visiting the chamber of the Great Pyramid." We had never said so, but that was beside the mark. "In fact, I have invited them," continued the manager more correctly, "and I leave them to your care. You will see that they are well attended."

This was appropriating us with a vengeance, and we hesitated. Osman had advised us not to attempt the interior, and Osman was always right.

"We are in for it, and had better go," laughed H. in a composite and unintelligible language we had invented for such times and purposes. "If we don't these people will be hurt, and think we have not done our duty." For H. is careful of other people's feelings. "In fact," he continued, "we haven't a voice in the matter: we are prisoners on parole."

It seemed so; for the Sheykh with a profound reverence, a lordly mien and majestic step we should have vainly tried to imitate in European costume, took us under his ample wing and conducted us in solemn procession to the entrance of the Pyramid. Here we found a number of Bedouins anxious to be our guides, and it was only the

A Personally-Conducted Mounting the Great Pyramid.

exercise of supreme authority that the Sheykh appointed two out of the number to conduct us to the Tomb-Chamber.

But we were not to be alone. Other visitors were there for the same purpose, and some were entering whilst others were coming out, like bees at a hive.

The entrance was in the centre of the north face, about forty-five feet from the ground. In the days of Herodotus and Pliny, the entrance was unknown. A perfectly smooth surface was all that was visible; a huge stone blocked up the passage. It was the arrangement of this passage and of the interior generally, which caused Mr. Piazzi Smyth and other writers to conclude that the Pyramids had fulfilled some higher purpose than that of a tomb. All this, however, is mere conjecture, no matter how cunningly and skilfully they work out their theories. Herodotus mentions that the Pyramids had subterranean communication with the waters of the Nile, by which means the secret chambers could be inundated at will; though for what reason it is hard to imagine. This at any rate could not apply to the Tomb-Chamber so very far above the level of the river.

It is not known whether the ancient Egyptians ever revealed the secret of the existing chamber. To have done so would have been a violation of their principles and of the purpose for which they were constructed. A false opening led to a narrow passage and a lower chamber, and even Herodotus is not supposed to have known more than this—which might account for his Nile theory.

The Pyramid, it is supposed, was first disturbed during the wars of the Seventh to the Tenth Dynasty, more than 2000 years before the Christian era. Whether it was then rifled or not, can never be known. The aperture was again closed up and remained so for ages. It was reopened by the Persians about the sixth century, and the Romans obtained access to it.

Then came the Arabs, who concluded that these gigantic monuments must be treasure chambers, and did their utmost to discover the secret.

In the ninth century it is said that Khalif Mâmûm, son of Haroun-al-Raschid—the wonderful monarch we have all met in fable—once more opened the Great Pyramid, in the hope of finding such inexhaustible treasures as the 'Arabian Nights' love to describe. Tradition had handed down marvellous tales of gold and precious stones, all buried in these gigantic structures. Infinite pains were taken by the engineers of that time to discover the opening, but accident and not skill revealed the secret. An inconceivable amount of time, money and labour was spent in the fruitless effort; a host of workmen were employed. All in vain.

Yet the engineers must have drawn their conclusions from some solid reasoning, for they were not far out in their judgment. They took the centre of the Pyramid as the basis of their operations; but the ancient Egyptians, foreseeing such a moment as this, had not placed

their passage in the centre. The Khalif, however, was not to be daunted, and engineers by dint of vast labours, disturbed the polished surface and removed the huge stones, gradually burrowing into this apparently impenetrable cavern.

At length, one day, when they had excavated to a considerable distance they heard, fifteen feet to the left, the falling of stones and masonry, loosened by their own work. Changing their course they soon discovered the secret passage, which led to the tomb-chamber.

Disappointment resulted. If gold and precious stones had once been there, they were there no longer. Even the very tomb itself—the mausoleum of Cheops—was empty, and the huge stone lid was gone. The workmen, baffled of their "treasure trove," threatened to revolt.

Then the Khalif cunningly had a certain amount of coin secretly transported to a niche in the passage: and the sum was found to be exactly equal to the sum spent in opening the Pyramid. It seemed, however, a reward for labour, and though no one was the better for it, every one was satisfied. In the jar was found a parchment bearing the following prophecy:

"Mâmûm, son of Haroun-al-Raschid, will in the year 813 open the Great Pyramid in search of treasure. There will only be found sufficient to repay him for his work."

This more than satisfied the men, who plainly saw that they had been merely carrying out the will of the prophet. The task had to be done, and they had had the honour of doing it. But as usual, fabulous stories of vast discoveries and untold wealth went down to posterity, rivalling the 'Arabian Nights' in their inexhaustible resources. These stories would please the Arabians of all times, whose gorgeous imaginations revelled in the luxurious and the impossible. They were only children of a larger growth, just as we all are to-day.

All that the Khalif, his engineers and workmen found was an empty tomb-chamber of polished granite, formed of huge blocks so cunningly placed together that the joins were almost invisible. Eight square blocks composed the floor, eight the roof, eight the ends, sixteen the sides. The room was oblong. Like the Tombs of Thebes and other places, it is probable that this chamber had been rifled of its treasure long ages before, when all had been closed up again and made secret. And probably those who rifled it had not to seek for the entrance, like the Khalif Mâmûm. In the earlier ages it was always known to a certain number of Egyptians, any one of whom might have been open to bribery.

The only treasures ever found in the Pyramids were discovered by the English some fifty years ago: and this not in the Great, but in the Third Pyramid. But these treasures enriched science, and had nothing to do with gold, silver, and precious stones.

This is the most perfect of all the Pyramids, and has been called by the Arabs the "red pyramid," from its covering of granite. Here

was found a magnificent sarcophagus of basalt, beautifully veined with blue, and part of the mummy-coffin which had contained the king's body. Herodotus had declared that this Pyramid was built by Menkara—the Mycerinus of his own country—some 4000 years before the birth of our Lord, and the following inscription on the chest now in the British Museum proved him, as he so often was, correct: "Thou hast become Osiris, ruler of the north and south country, King Menkara, living for ever, born of Nut the goddess of heaven and of Sab the god of earth. The wings of thy mother Nut shall spread over thee as a shelter: thee, in whose name is hidden the secret of heaven. May she grant thee to be as a god, striking to earth all who oppose thee. King of the North and South—Menkara, living for ever."

The sarcophagus, which was also to have reposed in the British Museum, was unfortunately wrecked off the coast of Spain, and reposes instead at the bottom of the sea. There it possibly fulfils a more romantic destiny, as the tomb of some royal and illustrious mermaid—if mermaids ever die.

The "north and south country," mentioned in the inscription, refer to heaven and earth.

The tomb-chamber of the Third Pyramid is built entirely of polished granite, and the roof rises to a pointed arch resembling our Early English architecture. There are other rooms in the Pyramids; and according to history and tradition, another body—that of a woman—was buried here. This was the famous Queen Nitocris of the 6th or Elephantine Dynasty, of which Pepi-Merira and Neferkara were the representative monarchs. Nitocris was celebrated for her beauty, and for long was confounded with Rhodopis, the wife of Sappho's brother and the favourite of the Pharaohs. Rhodopis became celebrated in Arabian legend and was turned into a sort of baneful divinity, haunting the Pyramids; her flashing eyes and syren voice luring travellers to destruction.

Other legends, however, are more kindly to Rhodopis. She was the Cinderella of this imaginative people. According to the poetical story, the wind one day carried away her sandal whilst she was bathing with other maidens on the seashore. It finally dropped into the lap of King Memphis, as he was sitting in judgment. Struck by the wonderful beauty and smallness of the sandal, he immediately ordered that its owner should be discovered and brought to him. She was found at Naucratis; the sandal exactly fitted, and she was presented to the monarch, who immediately fell in love with and made her his wife: and when she died, buried her in the Third Pyramid.

Other legends are connected with the Pyramids which are supposed to be haunted by various spirits. According to the Bedouins, one of them has the form of a boy, another that of a man, who appear at nightfall and burn incense to the honour of the dead supposed to lie within. And as ignorant and superstitious people will often not go

INUNDATION.

near a churchyard in England after nightfall, so many in the darkness will not approach the Pyramids. But the legends are all full of poetry and romance, and rather add to the charm of these monuments of antiquity.

The supposed mummy of Menkara is now in the British Museum, and those who will, may gaze upon the remains of 5000 years ago. It was embalmed according to Egyptian art and custom with resin and aromatic spices. Remains of the woollen winding-sheet and other cloths are also there. Linen cloths were used in a later age.

Of all the Pyramids the interior of that of Cheops is the most easily examined, and is the only one open to general inspection. And so, thanks to the manager of the Mena House Hotel, who left us no choice in the matter, we found ourselves committed to the ordeal. It seemed much more formidable than last night's climbing expedition.

The entrance is twenty-four feet from the true centre, and forty-five feet from the ground, level with the thirteenth step of the "Jacob's Ladder" we had scaled last night. The human bees going in and out were therefore some distance above us.

Scrambling over a heap of stones, the accumulation of years, we reached an entrance composed of huge blocks of granite bearing a modern inscription. The passage was dark, low and narrow, scarcely allowing explorers to pass each other. The sense of entering this mysterious corridor, of having this immense weight of stone above one's head, was almost appalling. We felt as the traveller must feel who passes under Niagara—it was doubtful whether we should return alive. Our Bedouins lighted candles and hurried us in; no time was allowed for hesitation or second thoughts.

We first descended a narrow passage at an angle of 26°, about three feet six inches high, and nearly four feet wide. This passage continues for some 340 feet, and ends in a subterranean chamber—the sepulchral chamber found in all pyramids. Into this, if anywhere, the waters of the Nile must have flowed, as recorded by Herodotus, but no signs exist of their ever having done so.

This long passage and sepulchral chamber are not as a rule shown to travellers. After a distance of twenty yards we left it, and branched upwards into the passage leading to the Great Hall or Gallery and the King's Chamber. Half-way down, a horizontal passage diverges, leading to the Queen's Chamber. At the end of the twenty yards from the entrance, and at the commencement of the upward passage, we found ourselves confronted by a huge block of granite: the falling of which from the roof had long ages before revealed the passage to the workmen of the Khalif Mâmûm.

Passing round this stone into the upward passage, the air grew more warm and oppressive as we went on. Any lady given to fainting might have been excused for fainting here. The whole weight of the Pyramid seemed crushing down upon us. Our upward way

had to be made almost on hands and knees—a crawling performance uncomfortable as any that could possibly be imagined. Every now and then we slipped a step or two backward, and felt as if the end of all things was at hand. The guides threw a faint light around, which did little more than make darkness visible. The construction of the passage was so perfect that turning at the further end we could see the sky through the entrance; and at night we might have looked direct upon the North star of the ancients.

Here and there we passed explorers whose ordeal was nearly over, and we envied them. In the pale glimmer they looked ghastly and subdued, but this was probably only imagination. We would not ask them how they had fared, preferring to remain ignorant of coming evils. It seemed cowardly too. Stalwart inhabitants of the Old and the New World with superabundance of strength and animal spirits know nothing of weak nerves and feeble muscles: and we are none of us proof against ridicule.

So we went on for about 130 yards, when we branched off into the Queen's Corridor, where at last we had level ground to walk upon.

We found the Queen's Chamber small and nearly square, about 18 feet each way, roofed with enormous blocks of stone, over which 5000 years had passed as a day. The chamber is immediately under the apex of the pyramid; 67 feet above the base, 71 feet below the King's Chamber, and 407 feet below the original summit.

The room was empty and the air stifling; we soon satisfied curiosity, and turned back to continue our way up the main gallery. Here we came upon an opening called the *well*, 191 feet deep, and rather more than two feet square. It was probably never used as a well, but as a means of communication from one passage to another.

The gallery in which we now found ourselves was 150 feet long, 28 feet high, and about 7 feet wide. There were notches at regular intervals in the stonework, supposed to have been used in transporting the sarcophagus to the tomb-chamber, and certainly of use to modern pilgrims. But for these we should have found our progress a very slow and backward affair. As it was, in due time we reached the end of the gallery, from which a small passage led to the King's Chamber and the end of our pilgrimage.

Here, too, the atmosphere was insupportable, the tenebrous darkness only fitfully lighted by the candles held by the guides. The shadows flitting about might have been ghosts of those who had lived 5000 years ago. In this place of eternal night there could be no rest: no glimmer of daylight that ever penetrated, no cock-crowing ever heard.

But there were too many people present for a ghostly performance: whilst an unmistakable twang loudly speaking into the sarcophagus would have sent the most hardened ghost flitting back to the remotest regions of the land of shadows.

This was the chamber of the sarcophagus, or tomb-chamber; the largest of all and the most important: the reason for which the Pyramid existed. Here the body of the King was to repose for ever.

The room certainly looked as if myriads of ages might pass over it harmlessly; huge blocks of granite piled one upon another, their joints invisible. The flat granite roof had not moved a hair's breadth in all its forty or fifty centuries, and in spite of the more than 300 feet of masonry above it. It was composed of nine blocks resting on the side walls, each measuring nearly twenty feet. The chamber was over thirty feet long, seventeen feet broad, nineteen feet high. At the further end was the only object it contained; the only object within the whole Pyramid—the sarcophagus destined to hold the body of Khufu, the Egyptian monarch: a plain tomb of red porphyry, about seven feet long, three feet wide, three feet high. The lid has disappeared. When struck, the tomb gives forth a bell-like sound. Enterprising "tourists" are chipping off pieces to carry away as memorials, and in course of time the sarcophagus will no doubt follow the example of the lid and vanish away.

How long the body of Cheops reposed here, or who first entered and rifled the tomb of its treasure, will never be known. It must have been long ages before the days of Haroun-al-Raschid and the Khalif Mâmûm. If the mummy were still there it would add very much to the interest and solemnity, not only of the tomb-chamber, but of the Pyramid itself. As it was, Osman was right in saying that the ordeal was painful and the reward insufficient. The moment you enter the narrow corridor haunted by bats, who find a fitting home in this impenetrable darkness, you are oppressed with a sense of suffocation. In the King's Chamber it was intolerable, but happily there was nothing to detain us within its gloomy limits. The tomb has not even an inscription, and the walls are smooth and bare.

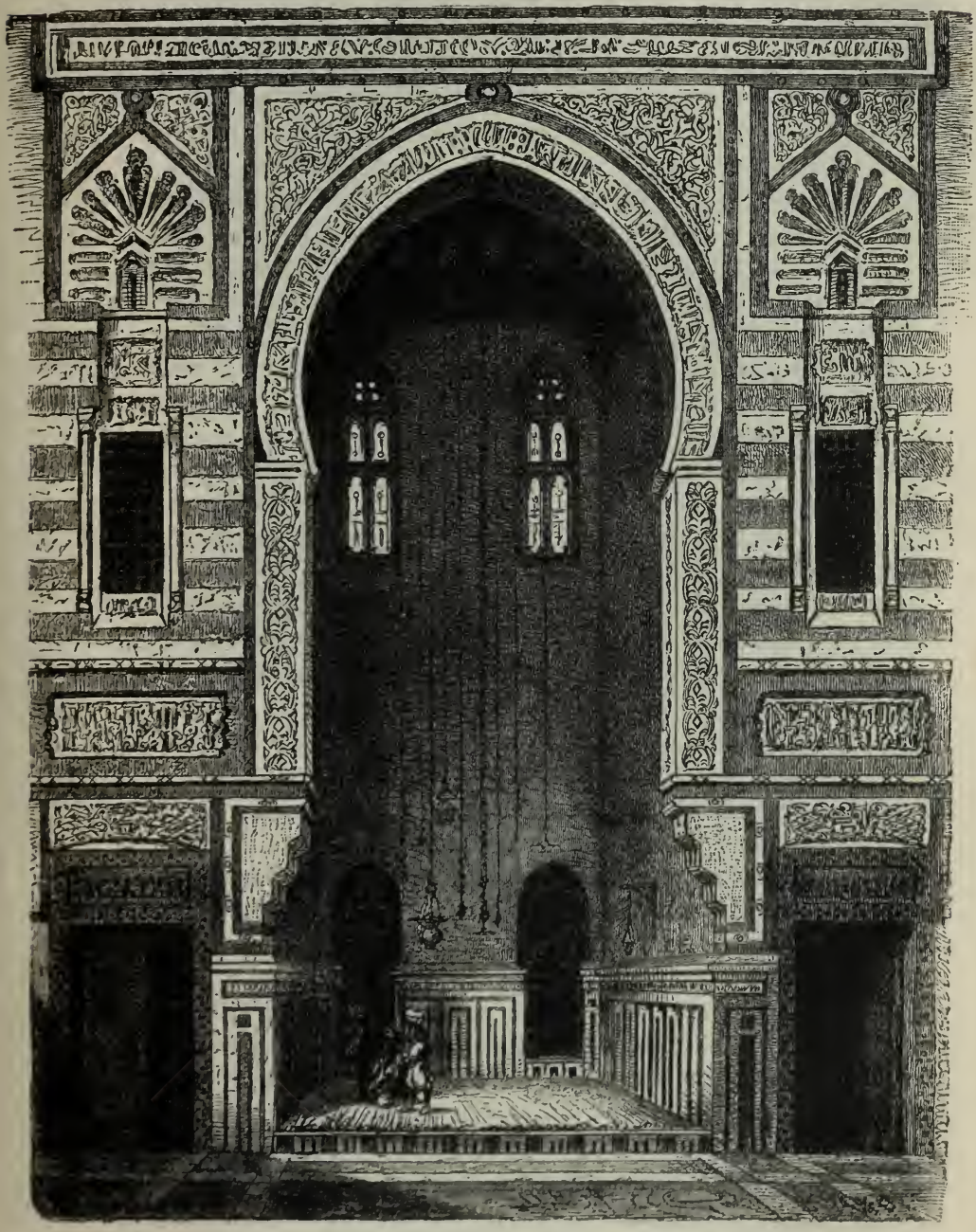
The chamber is not immediately under the apex of the Pyramid, like that of the Queen, but lies a little to the south.

Above it are five chambers one upon another, built to relieve the tomb-chamber of the immense weight of masonry which must otherwise have crushed it in. These chambers are of comparatively recent discovery, but they have served one good purpose. The name of Khufu is found in them, written by the very workmen who built the Pyramid, one or two of the names having been let into the walls upside down: confirming beyond all further controversy that Khufu, or Cheops, was the builder of the Pyramid, and that for some unknown period of time his embalmed body reposed in the tomb-chamber.

In the first four chambers the roofs are flat; in the uppermost, the blocks are placed obliquely. The first was discovered by Davidson in 1763, and is called after him: the last, discovered by Perring and Vyse, bear the inappropriate names of Wellington, Nelson, Lady Arbuthnot and Colonel Campbell.

We were more than glad to turn away from the King's Chamber,

and retrace our steps. Even H. in the pale glimmering candlelight looked in need of an air-pump, and remembering sundry occasions in boyhood, when even the atmosphere of church had been too much for him, and we had helped him out only just in time, a sudden fear



PRAYER NICHE IN MOSQUE.

seized us that perhaps something of the sort would happen again here. But all proved well. The downward slope was even more uncomfortable than the opposite, and with great rejoicing we found ourselves once more at the entrance. Never was light of day or draught of

fresh air more grateful. As we came out several were going in, one of them a lady, who grasped our arm without ceremony, and begged to be enlightened.

"Is it very terrible?" she asked. "I want to go, and I hardly dare go. Is there much to see? Have they air-pumps, and the electric light? Is there a refreshment stall in the tomb-chamber? No! But suppose some one fainted? You don't mean to say these miserable little candles are all the light we have to guide us? And what if they go out? candles won't burn in bad air. We should be at the mercy of these ferocious-looking Bedouins, who are positively terrifying with their dark faces, flashing eyes, and loud voices. Such creatures! Pray excuse so many questions. You see, I am a poor hysterical creature, and when an attack does seize me, it takes a very strong arm to hold me up. Now, if you would only——"

This last sentence was addressed to H., who looked equal to any emergency. In goodness of heart and susceptibility of emotions, he would there and then have offered his escort, and once more gone through the terrible ordeal—two ordeals on this occasion. But we were beforehand: and holding him with an eye of warning, we advised the hysterical but robust-looking lady—more than slightly inclined to *embonpoint*—to give up the idea of entering the Pyramid, and remain satisfied with seeing it with other's eyes.

Her expression immediately changed. The hysterics had only been "manufactured on the premises," and finding them unsuccessful, they at once withdrew into the background. A pitying look was bestowed upon H., a withering flash upon us: a muttered "Barbarian!" the grasp on our arm relaxed, and the substantial syren with firm and not small footsteps passed into the gloom of the corridor.

"Mentor," said H., "you rescued me from a troublesome task. I fear I should have given in to the lady's suggestion, and no one could be of any use in a case of hysterics in these passages. Besides, she really looked anything but a 'poor creature.'"

"Beware of syrens on your way through the world, Telemachus," we replied. "If we have saved you this time, on many a future day you will have to look to yourself. Our syren thought she would like your escort, and you would have found your task difficult, but not agreeable."

The old Sheykh, on the watch for us, escorted us with much ceremony to the hotel. Reaching its hospitable doors, we noticed a long string of carriages approaching in procession. At the first moment our thoughts flew to the Khedive and Osman, but the next we perceived that an absence of all state marked the cavalcade. The inmates of the carriages seemed all more or less excited, and the "repose of royalty" did not distinguish them.

"What does it mean?" we asked a manager, who stood with us at the door. "Who are these?"

The manager smiled, and for a moment did not reply: possibly giving time for our wonder to develop. "Members of some archæological or antiquarian society?" we suggested.

"Only in the matter of wearing apparel," he laughed. "These are a party of Cook's tourists, personally conducted. Their arrival was telegraphed to us this morning. As they have little time to spare, we are obliged to have everything ready for them."

Some of the carriages contained seven people: three on each seat and one with the driver: others had only five. They all rapidly alighted and swarmed up the steps. The manager advanced: we retired; a sort of "set to partners" figure. Every one spoke at once and the air seemed full of sound. Added to this was a noise of many feet and seven-leagued boots. As it chanced, H. caught sight of a face familiar to schoolday recollections.

"Why, Beauchamp!" he exclaimed, "fancy meeting you at the Pyramids, and in such a motley assemblage—you, the most fastidious of us all in those past days! What is the mystery?"

"Simply health," laughed Beauchamp. "I had overworked in reading for honours at Oxford. The doctor hinted at all sorts of possibilities if I didn't throw everything up for a time; I must go abroad, but not alone: the greater the change the better. 'Join a party of Cook's tourists,' suggested the Pater; 'no greater change than that, I should think; plenty of movement and excitement.' 'My dear,' mildly objected my lady mother, 'think for a moment; is the society quite——' 'Bother society,' cried Sir Hector; 'he'll have plenty of that by-and-by; it's a matter of health and this is the very thing for him: a host of people and no harm amongst them. I never did approve of his going in for honours. They won't help him to manage his tenants and raise his crops.' So it was settled—the Pater always did get his way, you know—and here I am."

"Doing Egypt?"

"Doing Egypt," laughed Beauchamp. "We have 'done' other countries too, or they have 'done' us, if you'll excuse a bad pun. Though I must say Cook's tourists get much less taken in than ordinary travellers: that is something in their favour in these days, when you are charged for every glass of water you drink and the very chair you sit upon."

"How long have you here?" asked H. "Can't we manage to have a day together, whilst the Personally Conducted are otherwise engaged? You might rejoin them to-morrow morning."

"A day together!" laughed Beauchamp. "It would be glorious, but impossible. Why, we are here for only three-quarters of an hour: and in that time are supposed to climb the Pyramids and refresh ourselves after the performance. See," he continued, "there they go; they have already commenced the ascent, and my meeting you here has lost me the opportunity. Not that I ever meant to take it," he added hastily, as H. began to apologise for detaining him. "I have

accompanied the party in their scrambles, but haven't scrambled half as much as they. Very often I prefer to look on. But if I had arranged to climb the top twenty times over, meeting you would have knocked it all on the head. So you are going through life with the sword, whilst I must be content with the pruning-hook! I envy you, and you probably envy me: it's always so. 'Man never is but always to be blessed!' I believe Pope is answerable for that line, and for a great deal of the malignant crossness of events that afflict us poor mortals. To foretell is to make happen."

"And I always foretold that if you went in for honours you would take them," laughed H. "We none of us had a chance against you in those days. I hope you haven't paid too heavy a price for them."

"I'm as right as possible," returned Beauchamp. "The whole thing was exaggerated. I got into a sleepless state through doing too much: reading by day, wine parties at night. Not that I cared about the parties or ever drank the wine: the stuff we get up there is so much poison: but I saw it gave pleasure to others, and so I kept them up. Weak, you will say, but amiable. True, and weakness and amiability are the cause of more than half the failures—far more than downright vice, which is the exception to the rule. At last, one day, when I had written Finis to my college life, I suddenly found that memory was failing me; sight was sometimes dizzy; and the doctors said I must take a long rest and change. Now I'm all right again: and as I don't suppose I shall ever construe another page of Greek or Latin as long as I live, my brain will hardly go wrong from overwork. But I am glad of what I have done. To become a scholar is every one's duty who goes up to the University. It gives you immense power; stability of character, wisdom to rule. All that *you* will get," he added, "even more than I: my training breaks off at this point; yours goes on through all the splendid discipline of a military life. You, too, will take honours some day, though a later day than mine. You have got it in you, and, as Disraeli said in his maiden speech, it will come out."

H. laughed. "That is all very well," he said, "but we have need of patience. Ours is a 'waiting game,' full of uncertainties and vicissitudes. Do what we will, the element of chance has to be reckoned with."

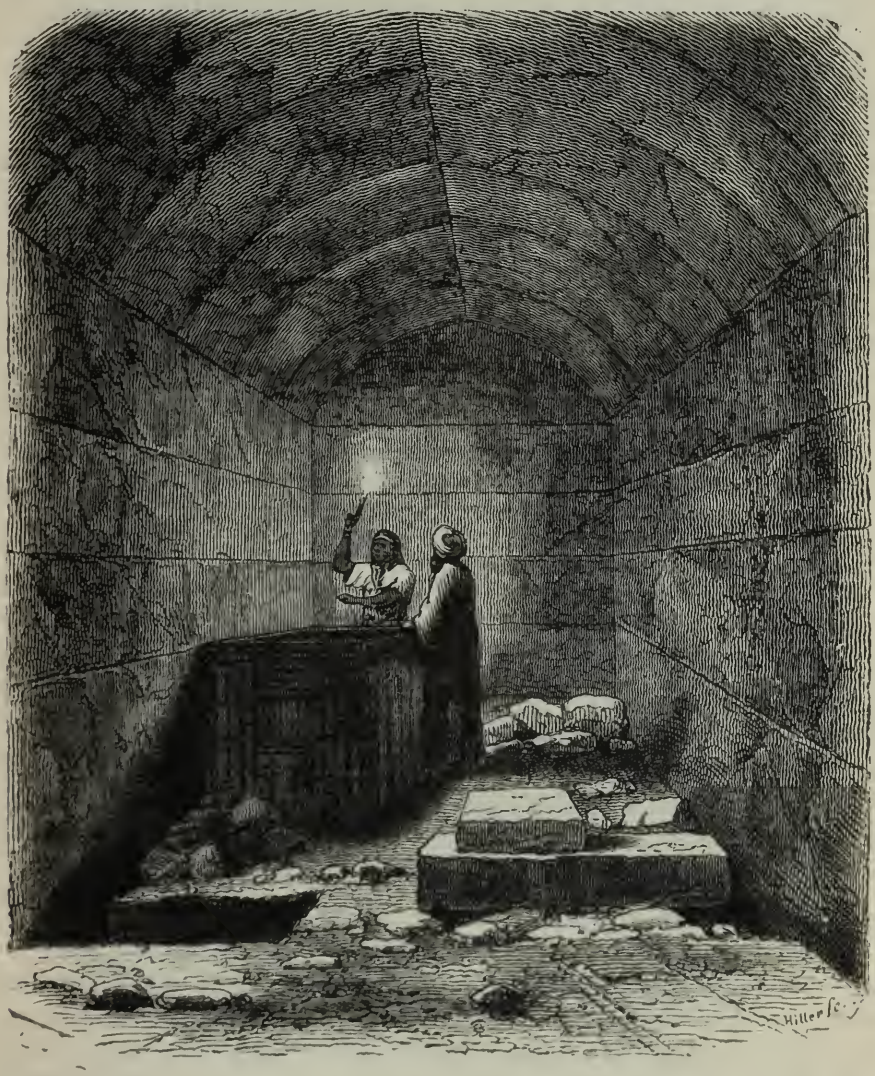
"I think not," returned Beauchamp. "There is no such thing as chance. And you can afford to wait. *Festina lente*, remember. But that doesn't apply to Cook's tourists," he went on laughingly. "Look at them at the top of the Pyramid—a crowd of some seventy excited beings. Now they are beginning to come down, like a swarm of flies on the side of a precipice: one almost hears them buzzing."

"I repeat that I can't imagine you in your present surroundings," said H. "You must have had some strange experiences."

"Wonderful!" laughed Beauchamp. "I set out with the determination not to be ruffled or inconvenienced by eccentricities, and

I have been often amused beyond expression; but there are a few really nice people amongst the party, and altogether I don't in the least regret becoming one of the personally conducted. As you know, most of the ground is old to me, and I might have turned myself into one of the personal conductors. Once or twice I did so, just by way of amusement. You have no idea what a capital showman I made."

"At what stage of the performance have you arrived?" asked H.



SEPULCHRAL CHAMBER OF MENKARA.

"Almost at the last. Our steamer sails to-morrow morning from Alexandria. The rest of the party have still some work before them, but I hope to be at Lisle Court by this day fortnight, giving a few days to Rome on my way through Italy. Here they all come—the Pyramid looks lonely and deserted. And now before we part, promise to come and spend a fortnight with me at the Court at your very first opportunity."

An unexpected meeting—a short interview—a hasty farewell—and the incident was over. Even as we had seen the wonderful procession arrive, so we saw it depart. The organisation certainly seemed admirable. The managers had their flock well in hand; not one was left behind; not one was even a minute late. All seemed to fall into their proper places, just as if they had answered to a roll call. It spoke well for those who had the controlling of affairs.

"Military time, indeed," said General A., who also watched their departure. "It really resembles another Exodus from Egypt, only this time they are turning their backs upon the desert. These are remarkable days, and men run to and fro upon the earth."

A cloud of dust; a string of carriages passing rapidly down the long, straight road; a hum of excited voices gradually dying upon the air; the cavalcade diminishing and disappearing in the distance; and the Pyramids returned to comparative repose.

The hour struck for us also. We, too, had to bid farewell to this wonderful region, where the voices of 5000 years ago seem still speaking to us; where we are overpowered with a sense of grandeur; the greatness of the men of those early days; their majesty of conception; how they realised man's immortality with unerring instinct, and made it evident in their religious records; evident even in those stupendous works, their mighty temples and tomb pyramids; the very sense of religious mystery enveloping the Sphinx with an atmosphere that is never lifted: all suggesting a Beyond and a Hereafter.

We left one morning when the sun was pouring his hot rays upon the mighty Pyramids and the vast plains; the hour when romance slept, and everything seemed realistic, and even the dignified Sheykh and the active Bedouins were robbed of some of their picturesque glamour. It was a sad farewell; we needed a succession of days and moonlit nights to get the spirit of the scene thoroughly into our minds: to feel that it belonged to us, that we also had our inheritance in these things. On such occasions we all say to ourselves that we will return some day; but life is short and the world is wide; we can only retrace our footsteps at the expense of some other lost experience.

As we re-entered the city, we turned a little aside for the purpose of visiting one of the Coptic churches in Old Cairo.

After the comparative repose of the Pyramids, the streets seemed full of life and sound; the houses looked old and picturesque with their ancient doorways and mushrabeeyeh windows, their small, quaint pulleys by which things were conveyed from the street to the uppermost storey. The women full of grace, and—as one could only suppose—full of beauty, were bearing their pitchers of water to and from the Nile. Their European sisters might well envy the unconscious dignity of their carriage, the freedom of their movements, the elasticity of their well-shaped limbs and beautiful feet. More than ever, after this short absence, we were impressed with the charm and

picturesqueness of Oriental life, in comparison with which all that is European fades into the hopelessly common-place and un graceful.

In a narrow street, where some of the houses looked centuries old, we found our Coptic Church; the oldest of the churches, but not the most beautiful: so concealed by houses that without a guide we should never have discovered it.

We passed through a narrow passage, ancient and not very cleanly, where we fancied fevers might lurk, waiting for their prey. The exterior of the church was a plain, unadorned wall, with no attempt at architecture. The interior was not very much like that of a Christian church. It is called the Church of Abu Sergeh, after St. Sergius. Large and lofty, it consists of a nave and aisles. In the centre is a large and magnificent screen of carved ivory and wood. The light is subdued, the general effect is heavy and gloomy; yet a want of repose characterises it. The nave and Tribuna have open roofs, supported by elliptical beams, but the left side-chapel has an Arabian dome gracefully proportioned. To the left of the screen a series of wooden panels bear sculptured Scripture subjects and the image of St. George, patron saint of the Copts.

The high altar is raised above the nave by seven steps of coloured marbles. Colour, indeed, but not refinement and repose, is the prevailing impression of this interior, in spite of various points of merit. The walls have some rich and beautiful mosaics of coloured marbles, mother-of-pearl, and blue opaque glass which looks like exquisite lapis lazuli.

The side walls of the nave are composed of two rows of columns, one above the other, the lower row separated by arches, the upper, supporting the gallery, connected by an architrave. There are many small paintings about the church, none of any merit; but the church once possessed valuable relics, removed some years ago.

These pictures on the walls enter largely into the Coptic religion. Its members begin their devotion by paying homage to the Saints and the Virgin. They also practise confession and fasting. The women occupy one part of the church, the men another. Their services often last three hours, and as there are no seats, they bring crutches with them on which they lean.

Silence and reverence form no part of their worship. Whilst the priests are officiating, the congregation talk and argue on all manner of subjects: often so loudly that the high priest turns and reproves them. During the service incense is burnt; the priest, carrying the censer, leaves the hekel or sanctuary and passes amongst the congregation, swinging the censer and blessing each member individually. The Sacrament is frequently administered, but the priest alone communicates, with the exception occasionally of those members who have previously confessed. He is dressed very much after the manner of the Roman Catholic clergy. Small round loaves bearing

a Coptic cross are brought to him by an acolyte. These are blessed, then placed upon the altar and covered with a white cloth, whilst he moves to and fro in the sanctuary accompanied by the choristers with lighted candles. The bread is then broken, placed in a chalice, and wine is poured over it, which he eats with a spoon, giving a little to the assistant priests and the choristers.

On Palm Sunday after service, basins of water are placed in front of the sanctuary. One priest then stands in front of them with his face to the altar, whilst another reads the Gospel in Arabic. The water is then consecrated. After this the congregation go up to the basins, tumbling over each other without reverence or ceremony, and dip palm wreaths in the water. These they wear under their tarbushes during the whole year, as a charm against witchcraft and all other evils.

On the 18th January, kept by them as the anniversary of our Lord's baptism, all the male members of the congregation plunge into the large bath of the church, whose water has been previously consecrated. Many also plunge into the Nile, into which consecrated water has been thrown. On the eve of the 18th, and on Holy Thursday, the priest washes the feet of the whole congregation.

It is said that the Coptic religion has become a mere matter of forms and ceremonies: but this is the tendency of all extreme ritual, whether Coptic, Protestant or other. It seems to be a truth from which there is no escape, that the ceremonial can only exist at the expense of the spiritual.

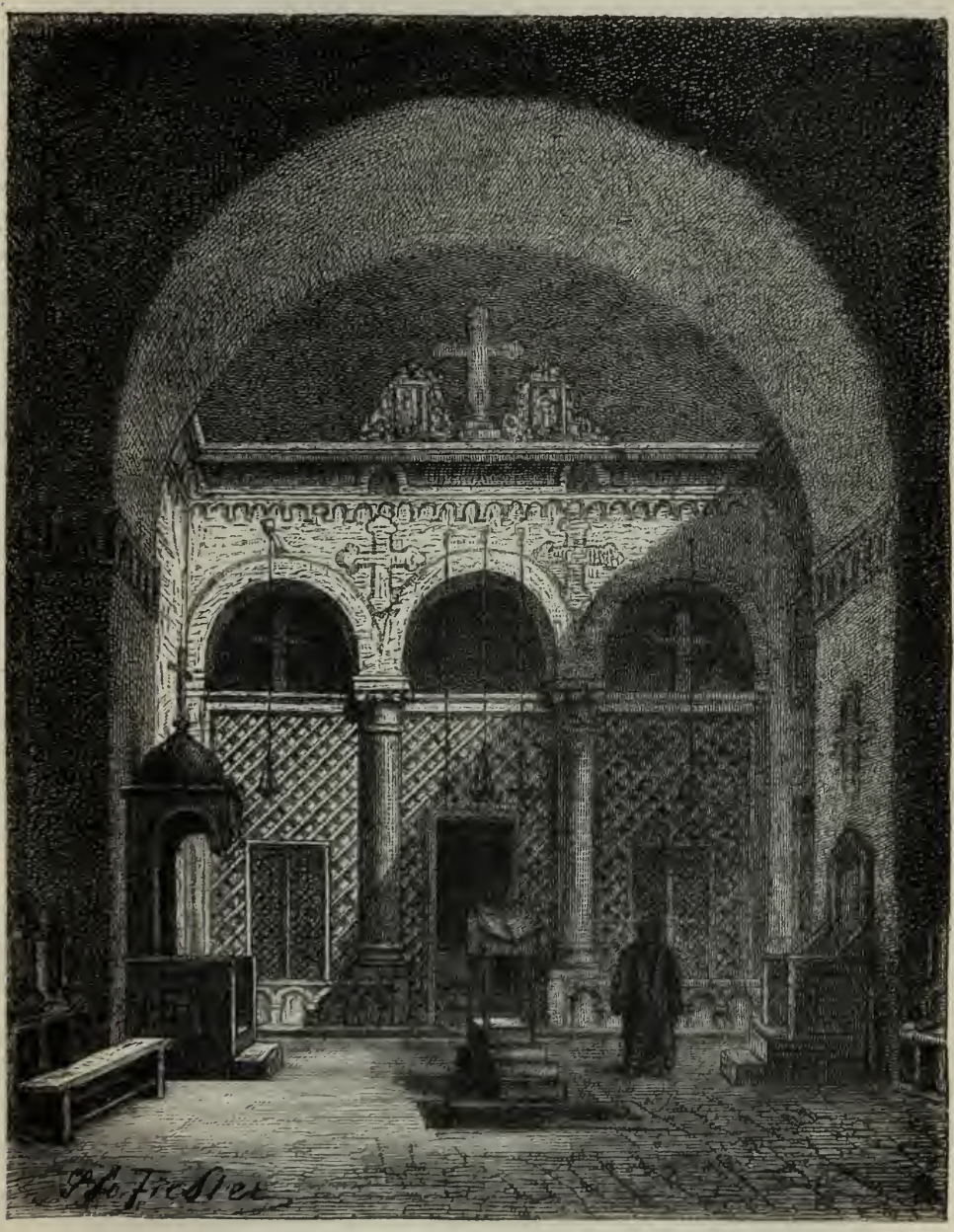
But the most interesting part of the church of Abu Sergeh is the crypt, a three-aisled subterranean chapel, which looks far more ancient than the church itself, and is dedicated to St. Mary.

Four pillars on each side form the centre and side aisles. In the walls of each of the aisles is a large niche or resting-place, and here Joseph, Mary, and the Infant Saviour are said to have stayed a month after their flight into Egypt. Whether true or not, we are willing at the moment to accept the statement.

Immediately the ground on which we stand seems to become holy ground, the crypt sacred as no other crypt ever visited. Before us rises a vision of the patient and wondering mother bending over her sacred Charge, unable to realise the stupendous miracle that has happened, for which she has been the chosen medium; yet knowing that in some mysterious way an eternal change has passed over the world; already conscious that between herself and this Heaven-sent Child there is a separating link which time can only widen. Even now she dimly feels that she bears in her arms what is not only man but God; that the time will come when, her mission fulfilled, this woman, blessed indeed among women, will cease to be the mother of her Son, for the earthly sonship will be merged in the heaven-appointed Saviour: Saviour no less to her than to the rest of mankind.

As we looked we seemed to be taking part with the scenes of those

far-off days. In a few moments the whole drama of that wonderful life passed before us: from the Birth in the manger and the Flight into Egypt, to the long series of miracles, followed by the Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. By some strange influence we fell back into touch with those days and times, as new, as



INTERIOR OF A COPTIC CHURCH.

real, as important to us at this hour as they were to the disciples who witnessed them. There was a holiness, a sanctity, a pathos about this little crypt not to be described: almost we seemed to hear a voice saying to us, as to Moses of old: "Take off thy shoes from off thy

feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." It was bare and comfortless, and must have been even more so in those early days; only the extreme poor and humble would avail themselves of its shelter: and it brought vividly before one the words spoken years afterwards by the Saviour: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."

More than eighteen centuries had since passed, yet the spot on which we stood might be exactly as it then was. None ever visited by our Lord could touch the heart more: not the garden in which He passed through the agony; not Calvary itself; not Bethlehem in which He was born, nor the Sea of Galilee from which He worked some of His miracles. For in this poor crypt, we felt the essentially human side of the tragedy: the weakness and weariness of the human mother, the helplessness of the divine Infant, over whom the hosts of heaven were keeping special watch; above all the lowliness and humility, the self-accepted poverty of Him who was possessor of the whole realm of Nature, King of kings, and Lord of lords. "Could I not pray to my Father, and He would presently give Me twelve legions of angels?" Even then, Mary, filled with wonder, must have pondered all these things in her heart.

We passed from this atmosphere of holiness in which we had lost ourselves in contemplation, into the world around us: the busy picturesque streets of Cairo: a city in itself so great a link with the past.

And when we entered the crowded hotel, we felt our last touch with the Pyramids of Egypt fall away. But we found a compensation awaiting us—as in this world, in spite of all sorrow and sighing, compensations never fail—a note from Osman, asking us to join him on our return from Gizeh, and declaring that he had plans and surprises for us which would not tarry.

This we might have expected from such a nature as Osman's; and before long we were crossing the Esbekeeyeh Gardens with their shady trees and well-kept borders on our way to the unknown.

THE STREGA'S CURSE.

By Lady Margaret Majendie.

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER that, Nino felt that the sooner his unhappy *protégée* left Florence, the better it would be both for her and for all concerned, and he eagerly welcomed the letter of Don Giacopo containing the answer from the convent, which announced that the Superior was ready to receive Colomba.

Nino at this time found himself in the painful position of not knowing whom to consult. The instinct which had raised him so far above the level of his fellow-villagers, told him that Colomba's splendid tawdry dress would prejudice against her, at the first sight, the gentle disciplined sisters who were about to undertake her education; but he did not know how to tell her so, and he fancied that in this Pippa would not be able to help him.

But he was wrong: she saw the disturbed anxious looks with which he eyed Colomba's tawny draperies, as the light caught their rich folds, and she perceived it at once. With a little nod to herself she felt, with a thrill of self-congratulation, that she could help him in this, she could do something to please him: little Pippa was so thankful for any small way in which she could relieve the intense gratitude and sympathy with which her heart was bursting.

Pippa followed Colomba into her own room with her usual timid manner, twisting her fat hands in her apron.

"Signora," she said—"dear Signora, so you are going to leave us."

Colomba turned her large eyes on Pippa with astonishment, she had never voluntarily addressed her before; but Pippa wanted to help Nino, so she mastered the fear that the great eyes caused her, and went on:

"My Signora must occupy herself with thinking about gowns; she has nothing that will do."

"I shall make no change," said Colomba languidly.

"But that is impossible. The good sisters will say, 'This is no lady—this is an actress, a columbine.'"

Pippa was so frightened that she hung her head to hide her burning cheeks, but Colomba was not angry.

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "What shall I get then?"

"Ah, you are good, you are kind, Signora," cried Pippa, overjoyed. "See, I know a certain Serafina Nando who lives in this street, she works for Madama Bruni who makes gowns for all the great ladies. If you would try her, Signora. Donna Christina herself goes there."

"I will go," said Colomba, sinking back among her yellow cushions.

Her heart was burning now with the one fierce ambition that was swallowing up all the love in her soul. She would become a lady; she would become the equal of this man who had married and deserted her, she would meet him some day in his own world, and then—— Beyond this she never went, for a terrible vision would obscure all her reason and thought. She could see the evil face of the hideous old Strega leaning over her, and hear her whispers of easy revenge.

Pippa went away, and was soon singing over her work, for she had done something for Nino.

The dressmaker to whom Colomba went had an artistic knowledge of the suitable. She dressed Colomba in straight severe lines of black and dark-coloured serges.

Nino saw and approved. He knew that Pippa must have done this; the little tender attention to his wishes, to his sufferings, soothed and comforted the life they could not greatly affect for either weal or woe, but such unobtrusive affection was a very real comfort. The day of Colomba's departure came at last, and Nino took her to the station. She was rich, for her country—very rich; she could afford to travel with all ease and luxury.

Nino had engaged an attendant for her, a woman who would take her to the French convent, and leave her there. He gave her many exhortations as to the care she was to take of her young mistress—exhortations which the woman received with some contempt.

Nino stood by the side of the carriage in which Colomba had taken her place; he stood looking up into her face.

"Good-bye, Nino," she said, holding out her hand to him. "Good-bye, my friend."

"You will write?"

A hot blush rose in her cheeks; she could not write.

"Yes, some day," she answered

They were very commonplace words. He only pressed her hand to his quivering lips, he only looked up at her with anguish in his eyes, a last look that was drinking in the vision that was to be henceforth all his portion of earthly joy. Then the train moved slowly out of the station.

Colomba waved her hand and drew back, glad to be quit of this dumb sorrow, glad to return to her own fierce brooding thoughts undisturbed by the trouble of another.

Nino stood watching till the train was out of sight; he felt sick and shaken, as if some physical strength had gone out of him in that farewell.

He was awakened by the touch of a hand on his shoulder, and he raised himself with a start; he thought that he was in the way, and lifted his hat with a muttered apology.

"I beg your pardon," said a quiet voice. "But I fancied you were not well."

"I am at your service."

He looked up, and saw standing before him the slight figure, in smart uniform, of the young officer who had been with Gian on the occasion of the scene on the Ponte Vecchio.

"Signore," exclaimed Nino, "have I not seen you before?"

"Yes. I was present when——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Nino.

"And I was interested. To-day again I have seen you putting that most beautiful lady into the train. I fancied that you were ill, and I ventured——",

"There needs no apology," said Nino with his own peculiarly sweet smile. "I am very glad to see you. There is a bench yonder, may I sit there?"

"Not there; come into the waiting-rooms. We should be interrupted," and the young officer led the way.

Nino almost fell on to one of the hard benches; he looked so white that Marco hastily left the room and brought him a small glass of brandy from the station buffet.

"You are very good, sir," said the poor fellow as the colour came back to his face. "I feel your kindness deeply."

"And now, can you tell me anything about it?" said Marco.

Nino paused for a moment, then he said gravely: "Young sir, I may trust to your honour?"

"Indeed you may."

"Then I will tell you the history of my unhappy ward."

In a few words he told the outline of Colomba's story.

Marco listened with deep interest. "Can you then tell me," he said, "what possible connection this story can have with my friend Giovanni Montana?"

"Ah, if you could tell me that! Colomba thought that she recognised in him the friend for whose sake her husband deserted her. Forgive this question—this friend of yours, is he a man of honour?"

"I would answer for him with my life, and you see he denied it; but surely we can go further. You can see him and question him yourself in private."

"I would, sir, but I know neither his name nor his address."

"I will give you both; I will prepare him for your visit."

"No; say nothing to him. Let me find him unprepared."

"Remember his honour is unimpeachable."

Nino bowed.

Marco looked at his watch. "I cannot go with you," he said. "I am off by this next train to Turin; but see, I will give you his address, and if ever I can be of any service to you in this most unhappy matter, you may command me."

He wrote an address quickly on his card, handed it to Nino, and went off quickly to his train.

"Via Ceretani. No. 50."

Nino put the card in his pocket and went out. He felt weak still, so he engaged a carriage and caused himself to be driven there.

"Captain Giovanni Montana was at home."

With a beating heart Nino mounted the long stone staircase. He felt as if he must be on the verge of discovery. That Giovanni Montana was a man of honour he was told, but men have different ideas of the obligations of honour; the secret was his friend's, not his own; that was altogether a different thing. For a friend, according to some men's ideas, a man might find himself forced even to tell a lie.

Gian was seated before his writing-table, writing fast, with a cigar between his lips. He was a fine soldierly-looking fellow, and when he rose and came forward, bowing politely, and quite successful in concealing the astonishment he felt at the appearance of his visitor, Nino felt that the quiet blue eyes met his frankly enough.

"I am sorry to intrude," he began; but Montana courteously offered him a chair and took one himself.

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?" he said

"You can perhaps explain something to me," said Nino. "I do not wish to offend or to hurt you, but the interests of another are in my hands, and if you can help me, I am sure you will."

"I will do what I can," said Gian, greatly puzzled.

"You remember that day on the Ponte Vecchio?"

Then the recognition flashed upon Gian. This was the man who had taken Colomba away. As he looked hastily up, the colour fled from his cheek and lips.

"I see that you recognise me now," said Nino quietly. "I am the guardian of that poor wild girl who pursued you in her reckless sorrow."

"Then you should take better care of her," said Gian bitterly. "Such scenes are not for her honour or respectability."

"I grant it; but there are moments in life when great griefs rise above all minor considerations. Colomba was mad with sorrow, wild with despair."

"All this is no affair of mine," said Gian.

"Then you are no man!" cried Nino. "You can look me in the face, sir, and say that such agony as you witnessed that day is nothing to you! Bah! You would have been the first to show kindness, sympathy, were it not necessary that you should assume this heartless callousness because you have something to conceal!"

"Signore!" cried Gian, rising to his feet, "I do not know to whom I have the honour of speaking, but this language——"

"You must listen," said Nino firmly. "For I must know. This man whom Colomba calls her husband is your friend."

"He is not her husband," cried Gian; then suddenly perceiving the mistake he had fallen into, he paced rapidly up and down the room.

"I see that you know all about it," said Nino, watching him breathlessly.

Gian came forward suddenly. What was the use of denying it.

"Yes," he said, "I know!"

"And you will tell me?"

"I swear that I will never tell you. You know this much, the marriage is incomplete—my friend is as free as I am at this moment!"

"And you call this man your friend?"

"The nearest, the dearest I have in the world."

"Then I have nothing to hope from you," said Nino slowly.

"Do you want money?" exclaimed Gian. "Does Colomba want money? I am ready."

But Nino stood up, leaning heavily on the table.

"I will wish you good-morning," he said. "I will go before your insulting words cause me to forget my infirmity."

Gian sprang forward. "I am sorry," he said. "I did not mean to wound you. Oh, if you could see into my heart you would know how unhappy I am also."

"A man must needs be unhappy who makes himself thus responsible for the actions of a scoundrel—that is, if he himself be an honest man."

Gian turned away. What could he say? What could he do? A bitter groan burst from his overladen breast.

Nino heard it as he left the room; he turned half round and said:

"God forgive you, sir!"

Then went his way, worn out and weary, back to his empty home.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE next three years passed away. There are few families that can look back on three whole years of life without counting many changes, great and little, in life and circumstances.

To the Baldovas living in their fair home at Santa Chiara, time had passed calmly enough. Time had not dealt with all of them kindly. Don Giacopo did not look a day older, there were no new grey hairs in Donna Christina's dark hair; but time was gradually, very gently, very tenderly draining away the dearest life of the house of Baldova. The cruel insidious disease that chooses for its own the youngest and the fairest had touched Livio's chest. He never recovered his full strength. The look of delicacy, the bright flush on his white cheek, the too great brilliancy of his large eyes, all increased. There was a little cough, growing languor, weakness that stole on him so gradually that even his mother hardly perceived to what an extent it had gone.

Donna Christina did not see it, would not yet face what was coming.

In the bright spring-time they were all expecting a very joyous event. Aimée de Marcelin was coming home. Then perhaps the hope of Donna Christina's life might be fulfilled. Aimée might become her own child, her son's wife.

Livio smiled and acquiesced, he did not seem to care much. Something had taken possession of him which was rather absorption than indifference. He seemed to be withdrawing himself by slow degrees from the home interests and cares he had once enjoyed so gaily. It was not exactly that he lost interest in them, but that, unconsciously, he seemed to become a spectator rather than an actor in the business of life.

He had never returned to his regiment after his long illness; his health did not allow it, and as the lassitude of failing strength grew upon him he ceased to wish it. He lived at home, becoming gradually more and more of an invalid, and having about him a certain acquiescence in the state of things that gave little hope of recovery.

As time went on, a very tender and strong affection grew up between Livio and the wood-carver Nino Dori. It was not easy to trace it to the beginning; there was something sympathetic in their natures.

Nino came often to Santa Chiara; his kind heart was touched by the sight of the great weakness of this tall beautiful young man. Only seeing him from time to time, with intervals of weeks, sometimes of months, he noted the slight changes which escaped the home eyes, and the great pity which surged up in his large heart grew into love.

Nino would constantly try to give him pleasure. One day he noted that there was a photograph of Aimée de Marcelin on Livio's writing-table. He made for this an exquisite frame. Livio received the gift, of which he recognised the value as well as the beauty, with delight; the pleasure it gave him gave Nino the keenest joy.

Livio would sometimes drive down to Florence and sit for an hour or two watching Nino at work. Without any bidding on Nino's part Pippa would bring the great yellow cushions on which Colomba used to lean, and make him comfortable. The little woman did not put into words the strange feeling she had about Nino's friend, the feeling that she would do anything for him while there was yet time.

Leaning back among those cushions, little knowing that they belonged to his long-forgotten wife, Livio would pour out to Nino all the thoughts that coursed through his brain.

The poor young fellow was seeking for some point, some stand-fast on which to fasten, some staff that would give him strength, and it was hard to find. Now and then words of Nino's would bring to him, like a flash, a notion of what he sought.

Livio had not very much understanding of his mother's religion.

It was very calm, regular and devout. Like many other men, he looked upon it as a natural and proper thing that his mother should be devout—he honoured her for it, would not have had it otherwise for all the world; yet it had little influence or effect on his own life. From Nino he could now and then catch a spark of divine fire, an enthusiasm, a great faith which drew him out of himself. Nino's faith and devotion were as silver seven times refined; he had been through a furnace of pain, and had emerged from it transformed.

Livio was half-lying one day in Nino's *atelier* watching the artist at work. The sun was setting, and a soft rosy light shone over the room, giving a hue almost of health to his pale cheeks.

"Nino," he said softly, "look at my hand," and he held out his thin white hand on which the blue veins stood out prominently.

Nino took it in his very tenderly.

"No, but look at it," Livio went on; "do you see what a beautiful thing it is? so strong and yet so soft, each finger with its own vocation and importance, the veins traced clearly, the nails so delicately tinted. You could produce nothing so beautiful, my Nino: your art would not do as much as this."

Nino shook his head and smiled. "My work is second-hand," he said. "This hand of mine must be made first before it can produce my work."

"And yet," said Livio, withdrawing his hand and looking at it carefully—"and yet your work will live, years, centuries perhaps, without accident, whereas this, no science, nothing known on earth can arrest its dissolution into dust; and that very soon, believe me—very soon."

Nino's eyes filled with tears; but Livio did not see it, he was looking at his hand.

"After all," he said, "the beauty and grace of the hand are in the life that animates it; there would be no beauty in the delicate interlacing of sinew and muscle and nerve, but for their purpose of movement. And the moral of it is, better a short life lived, than a thousand years of inanimate beauty. Will you carve something to fossilise my memory, Nino?"

"Who knows? perhaps I——"

"Nonsense, my friend. I feel a wish to arrange a sort of canopy for myself, a kind of carved four-post bed in which I shall sleep without dreams, and I think I should like it of wood, not stone—stone is so cold—besides, I want you to do it. Shall I make you a rough sketch, some day?"

Nino nodded, for he could not speak.

Livio rose restlessly and re-arranged his pillows.

"Tell me what you hear about your ward," he said. "She interests me. How is she getting on?"

"Very well," said Nino, returning to his work. "She writes more happily now."

"You know that we hear of her sometimes from my cousin Mademoiselle de Marcelin?" said Livio.

"Ah, yes; and what does she say?"

"She gave the strangest account of her when she first arrived."

"It must have been strange," said Nino; "she was fresh from her mountain village."

"She was so very wild and insubordinate that for a long time the good sisters were afraid that it would become necessary to send her home, but that is all over long ago."

"What does Mademoiselle de Marcelin say of her now?" said Nino, anxiously. "Three years make a difference in a life; she has never left the convent."

"I will read you the description," said Livio. "My mother gave it to me to show you. It is in a letter that arrived yesterday," and he drew a letter out of his pocket, closely written in Aimée's pretty handwriting.

Nino went on working, two red spots on his cheeks. Even now, though three years of effort and courage had passed, his heart throbbed and his hands grew cold when he received news of Colomba.

Livio, leaning back on his cushions, turned over the thin leaves of Aimée's letter with a certain tenderness. There was no real love in his feeling for his young cousin; he felt towards her very brotherly protecting tenderness.

The lassitude of failing strength made him unwilling to take any steps, such as informing his mother that her heart's wish would never be fulfilled. He would leave it alone for the present. Meanwhile he was fond of the pretty photograph that Nino had framed so royally, and he felt a pleasure in thinking of that sweet fair-haired child as his own, as long as she was absent in France.

"I do not think that there is much intimacy between my cousin and your ward, Nino," he said. "Their dispositions are so very unlike. Aimée is gentle and clinging, Madame Colomba self-reliant and strong. I will read you what she writes:

"'You ask me, dearest Aunt Christina, to tell you about Colomba Bondi, and you say that you are greatly interested in her, especially since you heard that she was the same beautiful girl whom you admired so much at Maiano. You would be surprised at the change in her. Sister Annette says that at last she is becoming like other people; but this is not the case, she is not in the least like other people. In a way she is very clever, she has adapted herself to the ways of our station in an extraordinary manner; her voice even is changed; she has disciplined herself into great dignity, all the wild *disinvoltura* of her manner is gone; when unoccupied, she has a way of sitting absolutely still, and her fine features have a strange concentrated look. She has done all she can in lessons, and by dint of extraordinary perseverance she can read and write, but the slowness of learning is strange. Our Mother Superior says that

she is not clever, but that she has the most dogged unalterable will that she ever witnessed. She has forced herself into adoption of the ways of the class to which she aspires, and in confidence the Mother told me that this concentration of will in one so naturally wild sometimes terrifies her. Sometimes nature breaks out. As a rule, the other pupils leave her entirely alone, some dislike her, others are very much afraid of her. But one day she happened to be called away while arranging her desk. In her hurry she left it open, and some of the more giddy and silly of the girls looked in; they found a box there which excited their curiosity, and they were looking at it when Colomba came back. I never saw anything so terrifying as her anger. It was quiet, but she was livid. The girls rushed away; some of them called the Mother, for they were frightened. She came, and went up to Colomba with that quiet, authoritative dignity that rules the whole community. But even she was startled by Colomba's face. Her lips were drawn back, showing her clenched teeth; her cheeks were scarlet, her great eyes blazing. I only was left in the room with her and the Mother.

"'"Child," she said, "what is this box that you value so greatly?"

"'"I will tell you," Colomba hissed out, suddenly. "It is the marriage gift I have prepared for my husband."

"'The Mother only said: "Poor child—my poor, unhappy child!"

"'I looked to see the softening come in her face, but I shall never forget the look I saw instead. I did not think that any human face could express such bitter hatred. The Mother only repeated her "Poor child," and then, quite suddenly, Colomba fell back in her chair, and fainted away.

"'The Mother came into the class room afterwards, and punished those who had done it; she said that the frightful force that Colomba was obliged to put on herself night and morning, to educate her temper and will, was almost too great a strain for even her health to bear.'"

"God help her!" said Nino, passing his hand over his brow. Livio went on:

"'You can have little idea how splendidly beautiful she is; in fact, though I cannot say that I like her—for even were I more drawn to her, she refuses all offers of friendship—I admire her with all my heart. I have made many sketches of her, which I will show you when I come home. Ah! that will soon be now.'

"That is all she says," said Livio. "And I think it is a strange picture of a powerful nature. Does it not strike you as such?"

"Yes, indeed it does," said Nino; "my poor child! how she has suffered."

"Yes. I would not be in the place of that scoundrel of a husband of hers for something."

Livio suddenly gave a violent start.

"What is the matter, Signore?" exclaimed Nino.

"Nothing, nothing! Tell me, do you know an extraordinary

feeling that comes over one sometimes, that what is passing at the moment has happened to you before?"

"Yes, I know it."

"That feeling came on me with such force, such extraordinary vividness, that it startled me."

"Ah, you look very white."

"Do I? Well, change the subject, and give me a light. I will try the soothing effect of a cigar."

CHAPTER XXII.

One lovely evening in the beginning of June, before the great heat of the Italian summer had set in, Giovanni Montana arrived at Santa Chiara. The air was sweet with the scent of a thousand flowers, and enjoying the fragrant delicious air, Gian tried to banish altogether from his mind the weary anxieties that oppressed him.

He was by nature open and candid, and the concealment of that dark secret left him no peace night and day. In vain he congratulated himself on the success of his silence, telling his conscience that the evil was done for a good end; that when Livio's peace and welfare were at stake, anything was justifiable.

During the past three years Gian had changed, had grown silent and grave beyond his years; grey hairs appeared in his hair, the quiet blue eyes had acquired an expression so sad and absorbed that sometimes Livio laughed at his friend, and vowed that he must have been crossed in love.

As he mounted the steps, and, telling the servant that he would announce himself, took his way into the verandah, all the sadness had given way to a look of expectation, for Signora Christina had summoned him to meet Aimée, who had arrived the day before.

When Gian came out through the yellow and white curtains, Aimée was seated alone in one of the old bamboo chairs in the verandah. She looked up startled, then suddenly jumped up with a little cry, and ran to meet him with outstretched hands, crying out, "Gian!"

As he took her hands in his, and looked down on her, his face was radiant with pleasure. He had been very fond of the pretty child who had once shared all his anxieties, and now in her place he found the very prettiest *mignonne* beauty he had ever seen. Aimée had soft curly fair hair, bright blue eyes shining with the kind of sweet goodness which pervaded all her thoughts and actions. The child had more than fulfilled the promise of her youth.

They sat down together, just as they used to do in old days, and began the quick cross-fire of questions and answers needed to pick up old threads of life.

"You are quite different from what I expected, Aimée," he said quickly.

"Indeed! and in what way? Am I bigger or smaller? or is it the absence of my floating hair?"

"You are so much prettier."

It escaped from him almost involuntarily.

Aimée laughed, then suddenly becoming very grave she said, "But oh, Gian, what is the matter with Livio?"

"The matter?"

"Yes. I am shocked, I am aghast at his looks. He is beautiful! ah so beautiful, but—but——" her voice broke and the tears rushed to her eyes.

"You must make him better," said Gian, deeply moved. "We have all been looking to your return for that."

The colour rushed into her face.

"Do not say that," she said almost passionately "Do you not see that I am as powerless as you are? What have you all been doing to him?"

"He is in God's hands," said Gian.

"Oh, Gian, Gian," cried Aimée, "what can be done to save him?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Gian. "Here they are!"

In the garden the two figures of the mother and son came into view, walking. Donna Christina, tall and erect; Livio, slightly leaning, with one thin hand on her arm.

The tears blinded Aimée.

"Gian," she said, under her breath, "do you not see it? Does Aunt Christina not recognise it? He is dying."

"You talk nonsense," he answered harshly; but she did not heed the harshness, she saw in it only the soreness of anxiety.

Donna Christina looked up, saw them in the verandah, and she and Livio came up the steps with smiles of welcome.

"Well, Aimée," cried Livio brightly. "And did you recognise this white-haired Methuselah? I declare there is a new white hair in your moustache, Gian!"

"He is changed," said Aimée, looking up at Gian shyly and blushing as she thought of the eager greeting she had given him.

Livio glanced from one to another, saw Aimée's blush, and the look of deep interest and admiration that Gian was bestowing on her, and a sudden smile lit up his face. This is just what would please him best; Gian should fall in love with Aimée, there would be a gay wedding, he himself would give away the bride.

Donna Christina interposed a little hastily, drew Aimée away on some slight pretext, and the two ladies went indoors.

Livio threw himself on a low sofa and opened the subject at once.

"Well, *caro mio*, what do you think of her? Tell me, does she not please you?"

"She is lovely; I never dreamt that she would be like this," he said warmly.

"Yes," said Livio. "She is charmingly pretty, Gian; you shall marry her."

"It is not worthy of you to make a joke on such a subject," exclaimed his friend indignantly.

"It is no joke. I am in sober earnest."

"But your betrothed?—your mother's wishes?"

"Bah! the betrothal only exists in imagination. And I, Gian—look at me. Tell me, is it likely that I should marry now?"

"I cannot see why not," said Gian hoarsely.

"Then I will tell you—because I am betrothed to a very cold bride whose name is Death."

Gian shuddered violently.

"You do not know what you are saying," he exclaimed.

Livio, leaning back in his chair, went on softly: "I will not sadden you. I only want you to face the truth. Little Aimée is like a sister to me; indeed, she bores me sometimes just as a sister would. I will bestow her on you with joy."

Gian paced up and down the verandah with quick steps; the bitterness of that moment was beyond endurance. What was he that he should dare aspire to the hand of a pure innocent child like Aimée?—he who knew himself to be guilty of a strange dishonourable deception, a deception which made every day of his life a greater burden to him. Aimée was charming; all the old affection he had always had for the child seemed to ripen and culminate into intense love for the girl, but his own sense of unworthiness seemed to him an unsurmountable barrier between them.

"I won't say any more about it, Gian, old fellow," said Livio, seeing his troubled looks. "We will let it rest, only remember that, as far as I am concerned, you need have no hesitation; my little Aimée is my dear dear sister, she can never be my wife."

A strange start ran through him as he uttered those words. Gian, looking up, saw the colour rush from his cheek and lips, leaving him ashy pale.

"What is it?" he cried, going to him.

"My own words," stammered Livio. "My wife! I have no wife. I never had a wife!"

"Are you dreaming, Livio?"

"I am all right."

He pushed back the hair, grown suddenly damp, from his brow, and sank back.

"Does that sort of nervous panic often come over you?" said Gian, in a subdued voice.

"No, not often now—a remnant of my illness—old delusions. I have self-control enough generally to stop it, but somehow to-day—There! forget it, and come into luncheon—the bell rings."

"You are weak and upset. Let me bring you something here."

But Livio would not listen, but went into the dining-room with his friend.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Livio came into the room the next day in his driving coat.

"Come, Gian; I am going down to Florence to see Nino about a design of mine, and also to gratify my inordinate curiosity."

Gian started; a sudden awful fear came over him.

"On what subject?" he stammered.

"Did not Aimée tell you that Nino's ward, the wonderful Signora Colomba Bondi, came back with her from the convent?"

"Is she then in the Borgo San Jacopo?"

"Yes; but she will not stay there. I believe that Aimée wants to bring her up here for my mother to see."

"Do not let her do that!" exclaimed Gian, hastily. "She cannot be a fit guest for your mother."

Livio laughed.

"Oh, as to that, my mother is not exclusive; she would enjoy the change of thought; of late she looks careworn. Have you not observed it? It will interest her. Come, you must go with me."

Gian consented. It seemed to him that matters were all drawing together towards some fearful catastrophe. Involuntarily he glanced at the figure seated beside him in the carriage. They were in a comfortable brougham, for Livio's hands were not strong enough to drive himself now. Gian thought of the peaceful life that Livio was leading —blameless it had always been. Of late it has become sanctified by its nearness to the dark river: a peculiar serenity was dawning on his brow, in his large dark eyes. Blameless, chivalrous, innocent of wrong, yet through his fault, the fault of his dearest friend, living in a false position, acting unconsciously a dishonourable lie.

And some day it would be found out; some day that fierce savage girl whom he had so deeply injured would claim him.

The cold drops stood on Gian's brow at the very thought of it. The crisis was drawing nearer every day. It must come—it was inevitable.

They arrived at Nino's door. Gian realised that he was in the hands of chance or Providence—he did not define which, he could no longer control events; he allowed himself to be drifted by circumstance, a cold despair possessed him. Livio would never forgive him—Aimée would never be his. Aimée, whom he loved as he had never loved before, who had suddenly been transformed from a much-loved child into a passionately-loved woman.

Together the friends mounted Nino's narrow stairs and came into the long *atelier* in which he was always to be found. The short ascent made Livio breathe hard, and lean on his friend's shoulder; but

Gian was too much pre-occupied to notice how much more evident his weakness became.

Nino was alone, very busy, only able to give the bright affectionate greeting to Livio, whom he loved dearly, and the ceremonious bow with which he always met Gian.

Gian threw himself on to a chair close to the window and tried to calm his troubled thoughts, while Livio sat close to Nino and began handling his tools one after another.

"I have not come to see you only to-day, Nino," he said boyishly. "I want to be introduced to Signora Colomba."

"But she does not receive any one," said Nino quickly. "Until she has settled her plans she will live in retirement."

"Then I must be satisfied with a passing glance," he answered, lightly. "But I warn you, I am curious, for my cousin Aimée says that she is magnificent."

"She is very handsome."

"And see, Nino," he went on, dropping the subject as if he did not care for it very much, "I have brought the drawing I told you of, and see, it is intricate. I won't have my uncle bargain over it. It will deprive him of half his consolation, but, all the same, I have a fancy for peace. So you are going to give me an estimate."

Nino took the drawing from his hand, but the smile faded from his face as he unfolded it, and he threw it down with a look of horror. "You have no mercy on us, Signore!" he cried.

"Nonsense!" cried Livio. "I won't have this nonsense. See, it is to be a kind of shrine, acanthus foliage, and there flattened into conventionality, carved solanum, to make me sleep. This is the canopy, here the cross, and somewhere and somehow you must introduce the little crossbill, the bird who with all his tiny might strove to draw out the nails and set our Master free. I have sketched it in roughly."

Livio took up the drawing tenderly.

"I love it," he said. "It has passed away many long sleepless hours. Don't refuse me, Nino. Will you do it?"

"I will," he said, in a choked voice.

"And the estimate?"

"I will have none; such a work would win me a reputation worth a fortune."

Livio rolled it up sorrowfully. "I never can get my will," he said.

Gian came forward with a forced smile.

"Do not refuse him, Signor Dori," he said.

"You have seen the design? You know its destination?"

"It will not hasten my death by a day or an hour," said Livio, with a little impatience. "And it interests me."

"You are right," said Nino. "See, we will be business-like; leave it with me and I will draw it out to scale, and let you know"

"You like it, Nino?" rather wistfully.

Nino's eyes were full of tears. "It is beautiful!" he said.

"And practicable?"

"I will see what I can make of it. See! the base of the cross is too small—it is poor." With a charcoal he began to sketch on the deal table in front of him.

"And you will begin it at once?"

Nino looked doubtfully at the mass of work around him, but Livio exclaimed, "Do, Nino, do, or it will not be in time."

"You try me too much," exclaimed Nino. "But there! I will do anything that will please you."

"And the work *en cachette* is finished, is it not?"

Nino glanced at Gian; he did not care to have his secret mentioned before him. Gian was staring out of the window with unseeing eyes.

"He does not heed us," said Livio; "take me to see it."

Nino led the way into a sort of cupboard-room. Within it stood, on a bracket against the wall, the most wonderful work of his life, the Crucifix, famous years after throughout Italy as "Il Cristo del Zoppo."

Livio looked at it in silence; his admiration was beyond words.

"Nino," he said, "when my last hour comes, I would fain that my eyes closed on that vision."

"Alas!" said Nino, "I would give it to you but I cannot; it is promised, and is to stand on the altar of the little Chapel of Santa Monica in Santo Spirito."

"Your favourite church. It will look very beautiful there. When does it go?"

"At once."

They returned into the *atelier*. Livio looked at his watch. "We must go, Gian," he said; "this place tempts me to spend hours here, but I promised my mother not to be late. Are you ready? I may come again, Nino, and interrupt you soon?"

"Who could be so welcome?"

They went downstairs to the carriage. Livio entered it first. Gian was about to spring in when something caused him to call out to the coachman: "Quick, Pietro! we are late! off at once."

He leaped in, and the startled coachman whipped up his horses and drove off rapidly.

The sight that had caused his movement had been this.

From the window of Pippa's room a face was looking out—a face of extraordinary beauty, magnificent wide-opened eyes, into which suddenly flashed an awful expression, a look, wild, frantic, full of recognition. Colomba was there. Colomba had seen her husband. The match was laid to the mine.

(*To be concluded.*)

CRUEL—OR THOUGHTLESS?

I WAS eighteen years old when I first met him who was to become my husband: John Hartley. After a very happy courtship of two years we married, and then followed a time that I marvel to look back upon, and wonder if the utter bliss of it can be but in my own imagination. John made the most devoted of husbands. At the end of a year a little daughter came to add further to our domestic happiness; in fact, there seemed to be nothing to wish for in this world, as we were neither of us ambitious for wealth or notoriety. Our home was in a large town in one of the Midland counties.

In this uneventful though most happy way three years passed, and then came the beginning of the heavy burden of misery I have since had to bear.

My husband—a qualified solicitor—was as yet only a clerk in a solicitor's office, where he held a position of considerable trust, and received a salary of £300 a year. This was sufficient to enable us to live in quiet comfort, untroubled by thought of the future.

I was sitting one winter's evening, quietly working and listening for John's return, when I heard the well-known sound of the latch-key in the door, and sprang up to go to him and help him off with his heavy coat.

Directly I met him in our little hall, I saw that something was wrong; there was a pinched look of suffering in his face I had never seen before.

"What is the matter, John?" I asked somewhat anxiously.

"I'll tell you after tea," was his reply; "I want something to eat badly enough!"

Nevertheless, when tea was brought in, I noticed he hardly ate anything, while he seemed almost unconscious of the many cups of tea I poured out and he swallowed mechanically.

I talked away about indifferent subjects, taking care not to ask any further questions, and it was not until just before our usual bedtime that he abruptly told me the sad news.

He had lost his situation and did not know how or where to get another.

My first feeling was one of horror. What could he have done to be so treated, I asked.

"Nothing," was his answer. "It is the most unjust, most unpardonable thing I ever heard of!"

And then he proceeded to explain that his chief had lately married—which I already knew—and that my husband had been in the calmest manner turned off to make way for a young brother of the bride.

"Not a good fellow, either," cried my poor husband. "To think, after faithful service, that I should be turned off, and for a stupid fellow who has neither brains nor experience to recommend him!"

"Fear nothing, John; I'll go to-morrow to Mrs. Bentham," I said with decision. "I'll beg her to intercede with her husband. I will tell her of our home and child, and ask her to beseech her husband to find some different berth for this young man. If she should prove hard-hearted, I'll beard Mr. Bentham himself in his own den."

My husband sighed wearily, though he tried to smile: I don't think he had much faith in the result of my mission, and, as events proved, he was right.

I went to that woman, young, bright, handsome as she was, with a fortune now at her command, which put all fear of poverty away from her for ever. I begged her—ah, how I begged her!—to intercede with Mr. Bentham; I told her of our child, of the difficulty of getting work, of how dependent we were on it.

And what was her reply? That she knew how hard it was for people to find work nowadays, and that was why she was so anxious that her brother should have this post; that as for me—if I had made an imprudent marriage she was sorry, but it was no concern of hers. If persons thought more before bringing unfortunate children into the world there would be less misery than now existed. As for interceding with Mr. Bentham, she laughed at my simplicity in imagining she ever interfered in her husband's affairs,—upon which she rose, as an intimation that the interview was over.

I turned away from her house, and with throbbing heart and a faint sickness creeping over me, made the best of my way to the office where my husband yet was, and through the consideration of one of the clerks, soon got admitted into the presence of Mr. Bentham.

I told my story in as moving terms as I knew how; I begged and entreated that some place might be found for my husband even at half his present salary. In a foolish moment I happened to say that I had failed with his wife, and could only hope to succeed with him. He at once rose and said:

"Madam, I can do no more for your husband; I have given him due notice, and shall be happy to answer any questions as to his capabilities. Your husband is clever and will easily find employment. His post is given to my brother-in-law; I have no need of further assistance, and do not in the least feel inclined to pay for what I do not want. And now, as I have an appointment to keep, I can only wish you good-morning."

How I got home I never quite knew; I felt so sure of what the search for work would end in, and I threw myself on the bed and cried myself to sleep. It was dinner-time when I awoke, but I had no wish for food; I had to rouse myself to give my little Rachel her dinner but it was hard work to do so. "Mamma headache?" the

little thing kept saying, and I could truthfully answer "yes," for every vein was beating and throbbing in my head as if it would burst.

I sent the child for a walk with the maid, and sat doing nothing by the fire, too wretched even to think.

After a time, I know not how long, I began to feel a kind of stupor and numbness creeping over me. I was not fainting or asleep, and yet the state partook slightly of both. It was many a year since I had felt this sensation; in the whole course of my life only two or three times, and on each occasion when I had previously done so, I saw plainly, as though it were actually happening, an event that afterwards in each case occurred. As the vision or representation came before me, this is what I saw:

A bare, small room with a few bits of furniture; a little child wrapped in an old shawl asleep on the floor; an old bench supporting —ah, what?—a coffin, and in it all that was left of the husband I had loved so fervently. I myself was not in the room—at least I was not conscious of any other figure being present.

With a low sob I sank on the floor by the fireside crying aloud: "Anything but that! Oh, anything but that!"

My child, coming in rosy and happy from her walk, was the first thing I was conscious of. The servant, seeing how ill I looked, tried to get me to bed, but I refused to go. I felt so certain that, come what might, I should have to live through the scene I had just had put before me—that nothing could ward off the blow; it was fixed beyond all change.

My great idea now was to be with my husband as much as possible until that day came, and never to leave him unless compelled to do so.

I have often thought that it was quite pitiful in this my first agony, the way in which I tried that the most unimportant things in the room should be just the same as usual when John came home. I ordered the tea to be in readiness, I even put on my best dress that I might look bright, though I felt as if my heart were breaking, and the lump in my throat threatened to choke me.

Doubtless all you who read this will think me weak and foolish, but you must remember that several times before I had been conscious of passing through a scene or vision which was so represented in real life afterwards. This—added to the fact that I was weak from the force of the shock that had come upon us so suddenly, that I had eaten nothing all day, and passed through a state of great excitement—made me less able to bear up than might otherwise have been the case.

At last I heard the key in the door, and again went to welcome home my husband, but how differently to the night before that seemed to be years ago now!

I suppose my gala dress did not impose much upon him, who knew every line in my face so well. He drew me into the room,

kissed me tenderly, and said, "Never mind, dear one, you have tried your best and failed; we have still God to look to for help."

He set to work to cheer me up, never telling me what I afterwards learnt: that Mr. Bentham, having gone home to his luncheon, had received a very exaggerated account from his wife of all that had happened; and on his return to the office had scolded my poor husband in no measured words for allowing me to be so impertinently interfering.

John would not even let me rail against Mrs. Bentham for her heartless conduct, as I so much longed to do, but replied with a gentle, "Don't be uncharitable, Mary; and above all never forget Who said, 'Judge not.'" This, with his tender pressure on my hand, effectually stopped my words, but not my thoughts. Could I have seen Mrs. Bentham she would have had from me but very plain truths.

Neither of us had any friends to turn to; we were both orphans. I was brought up by an aunt in a very comfortable home, but her income died with her, and she herself died shortly after my marriage.

It would be useless to give an account of our many struggles in search of work, and the utter fruitlessness of all our attempts. This little story would expand beyond its limits, and I should only sadden the reader. Any one in need of work and unable to find it, can well enough picture to himself how, each day, when my poor husband returned from seeking after what he could not get, his face would look more and more sad and pinched, his appetite and sleep slowly but surely leaving him. Those who cannot realise such a scene for themselves, I pray God may never do so.

We disposed of our furniture better than might have been expected, for our neighbours were kind and our landlord was considerate; so that we left the town where we had been so happy with a good sum of money in hand; sufficient, I hoped, to keep us until a new appointment was found. We took a tiny lodging just out of London, but although the fare was only a few pence to enable my husband to get to town, this soon became a consideration, and we had to take two rooms in a cheap part of London itself. Finally, alas! the two rooms were given up and we had to be content with one.

For three weeks my husband got work, and that was the utmost he ever obtained. I had also tried hard for employment on my own behalf, but without success, with the exception of some occasional plain sewing. I saw John slowly failing, and could only wait for the end I felt would come. Sometimes I almost prayed that rest might come to him before the last of our money was gone.

We had one room for some time which suited us fairly, but at last we were obliged to leave it as the landlord could let it at better advantage to himself. We looked about anxiously, and one day at dinner-time John returned in quite good spirits, saying he had found a place that was neat and clean, and we must go and take it that afternoon.

So we went; and no sooner had we entered than I saw the room that had come before me in my dreadful vision. Everything was as vividly clear as on the day it had all passed before me. I could see the exact spot where the bench had stood. I trembled and felt almost ready to faint.

"I couldn't come here," I gasped; "anywhere but here, John. Take me away!"

But John, who evidently thought that worry, and the nervous headache from which I had lately been suffering, had made me irritable, soothed me like a child, and pointed out how clean and good the room was, what a nice little peep at the sky we could get, and so on.

What could I say? I only thought "It is fate, there's no fighting against it;" and the room was taken.

From the very time we moved there my husband seemed to fail more quickly. It was so hard to prevent buying him little dainties when I saw how his appetite needed coaxing. But dainties we could not afford; our little stock of money was dwindling down to a mere nothing. By-and-by even our furniture went bit by bit, and I was looking at our two last chairs, wondering if they must go too, and if so where we should sit, when my poor husband opened the door and brought in a long bench which, he proceeded to tell me, the landlord had lent us for as long as we liked. I could not refuse it; what was the good? I did not need a doctor to tell me that John was going fast, and there would soon only be myself and child to struggle for. If it had not been for the child I should, I believe, have waited for him to go, and then followed him.

Ah! how often when alone did I think of the woman who had caused us all this woe, and almost prayed that she too might suffer, even as she had made us suffer. It was a wrong thought, and John would have been the first to reprove me.

We heard of her occasionally from one of the most unimportant clerks in my husband's old office. He had once done this clerk a kindness, and the man never forgot it, and wrote to us from time to time. From him we learnt that at the time my husband was dismissed Mrs. Bentham's brother had two other good offers of work, either of which he could have accepted, or possibly have obtained for John. Mrs. Bentham, however, liked to have her brother near, and she did not care one atom for all the misery she had brought upon us. The clerk had a chance of stating our case to her, and her only answer was: "Oh yes! I remember the woman! a very forward, persistent person; no wonder he has not get on, tied to such a wife."

Then we heard that the Benthams were in town; she had come up to consult a grand doctor for some paltry ailments, which existed but in her own imagination most likely.

I wondered what I should do if I met her in the street, whether I should shame her by shrieking in her face that she had murdered

my husband. But no, I would be quiet for his sake; when he was gone, then we would see.

I had not to wait long for this to happen. In a fortnight from that day, I was sitting on the ground by the empty grate, with the knowledge that on the bench at the end of the room was that which contained all that was left of my husband. I had the coffin placed there myself; all else had come true; so should this.

Rachel had fallen asleep. She was now four years old, for this had happened just two years and three months after we had left our happy home.

As I was sitting in a kind of stupor, it seemed to me I felt suddenly a rush of cold air, and saw something pass rapidly before my eyes. I felt sure too that I heard a shriek. I sat on, not rousing myself to take much heed of this, until at last my child's clinging little fingers restored me to consciousness again. What could it have been I saw and heard? Where did the breath of cold air come from?

It was getting on for the middle of June, and the room was hot and close. I could not even tell at what hour I had experienced this, though while I was wondering I heard a clock strike two; so it must have been between then and mid-day.

I soon ceased to think of the matter. I got my little Rachel some milk and a bit of bread for her dinner; it was wonderful how the child got on in spite of her privations. I had always managed to get good milk for her, and so far as her health was concerned I felt no anxiety.

The next morning, the day before my husband was to be buried, I was sitting thinking—the child was asleep—when there was a knock at the door, and in came, to my utter astonishment, the clerk of whom I have spoken as writing to us occasionally.

In a few hurried words he explained his great grief for me and my troubles, and the cause which brought him suddenly before me. He said he came by the express desire of Mr. Bentham, who had begged him to lose no time. Mrs. Bentham had met with a terrible accident —her life was despaired of.

She was travelling by train, and on leaning from the window to throw something out, the door had suddenly opened and she had been flung out on to the line. She was taken to the nearest hospital, and it was there she, the proud Mrs. Bentham, was lying beyond hope of recovery. She had expressed a strong wish to see me, and her husband had telegraphed for the clerk, who was the only person who knew our whereabouts. This was what he had come for. He had not known of my husband's death until the woman in the room below had told him of it.

For a long while I utterly refused to go to the hospital. "No," I said: "if she had been strong and well I would have gone to see her fast enough; but now God has punished her without my adding to it. If I went it might be all the worse for her. I don't know what I might say."

At last the clerk persuaded me to go with him.

The hospital was in town, as the accident had happened just outside Victoria, after Grosvenor Road was passed. Silently we went together in a cab, and as we were driving along, the idea came to me for the first time what the rush of cold air had meant, and the falling body I had so plainly seen passing before me.

When we arrived at the hospital, we were at once shown to the private ward where Mrs. Bentham was lying. She uttered a feeble moan when she saw who it was, and begged to be left alone with me. The doctor who was present said he did not think it would hurt her to talk, indeed ease of mind would be beneficial; but nothing could really do her good, she suffered no pain, and he trusted her end would be peaceful.

We were left alone. My heart beat and I felt almost suffocated, but went up to the bed and said: "Why did you send for me?"

"Because," was her reply, "I wanted you to forgive me for what I had done; my husband has promised to make full recompense to you for all you have suffered. Do forgive me! Believe me, it was partly thoughtlessness that caused me to act as I did."

"Your husband will be a clever man to do what you say," I retorted sternly, wondering at the time at the calm way in which I spoke. "You have murdered my husband. He is even now lying dead in our one room. Can Mr. Bentham give him back to me, do you think?"

"Dead!" she cried. "How? and why?"

"That is easily answered. He was killed as surely by you as if you had stabbed or shot him. He died of starvation and despair, and you and your husband are the authors of it all."

"Have pity on me, and forgive me," she moaned. "I shall so soon meet him now. Forgive me and let me take your forgiveness with me if I can take nothing else."

I was just going to make much the same reply as history has handed down to us, "God may forgive you, but I never will," when I seemed to feel my husband's hand on my arm and heard him saying again, "Don't be hard on her; judge not," as I had so often heard before. I hesitated.

If he could see what was going on now, what would he think of me, if I did not forgive the poor dying woman? I dare not refuse. But, from no better motive than the one given above, I said as calmly as I could: "If my forgiveness will help you, you have it; if you meet my husband, let him know that I have forgiven you," and with this I left, just as I saw she was almost fainting.

"Oh, you are good!" she cried. "Now I can die more——" What she would have added never came. Already the faintness of death seemed stealing over her, and I hastily summoned the doctors. They had two patients on their hands instead of one, for no sooner had I done so than I also became unconscious.

When I came to my senses I was in my own room with one of the hospital nurses by me, a fire burning, and all I could require, Mr. Bentham having said I was to want for nothing.

My story will now be soon told. By pure force of will I insisted on being with my husband to the last, but as the first shovelful of earth fell on the coffin, after it had been lowered into the grave, I gave up the struggle and once more fell to the ground, and was again without consciousness.

I learnt afterwards that for more than six weeks I was at death's door, and that when I recovered reason had left me. Mr. Bentham fully kept his word to his wife; he had me carefully and kindly looked after, and had my child cared for as though she were his own. He saw me when I was pronounced well and fit to have the charge of my child, and told me that he had settled on me for life, and on my child, the sum of £300 a year, which my poor husband had lost through the fault of his wife. Mr. Bentham assured me most earnestly that the harm had been more thoughtless than intentional; that my husband was so talented he never dreamed of his wanting employment and not finding it. This may be in a great measure true, but we cannot do even thoughtless things in this world without harm to our fellow-creatures, and I often wonder how far "I didn't think" will stand us in good stead in that last day when the secrets of all hearts are open and the motives of all actions become known.

Years have passed since the true events I have simply narrated took place. I am not thirty-five, and my life is calm and uneventful. No fresh troubles have come to me, but the troubles I have described were sufficient for a lifetime. I am happy in my child, and I look forward with a deep longing to the time when I shall meet my husband once more. But when I hear people say all "second sight" is a delusion I feel inclined to reply, "I have cause to differ," and give them as I have now given to you, reader, my reason for the faith that is in me.

POUR PASSER LE TEMPS.

"COME, Nora, be reasonable. I have already exceeded my holiday by weeks, and you must have known this—ah—kind of thing must come to an end. I have been very happy, and am not likely to forget my trip to Ireland, or my little Irish friend—for we *have* been very good friends; and you?—you will not forget me altogether I hope?"

He offered to take her hands. She let him do so, and he looked into her wide grey eyes, with a melancholy that was not assumed—oh, dear no! for though one may feel it wise to throw aside a pretty plaything, it is possible to have regret.

How calm she was, and how unnecessary had been his fear of a scene. Reasonable? yes, she seemed reasonable enough now although her colour had changed so at first.

Godfrey Graeme was not so well pleased after all. A man hates a scene; true; but on the other hand he is not gratified by too great a calm, when his mighty, fascinating self is to be withdrawn! 'Tis hurtful to his pride, and therefore not to be endured. Nora must show some pain.

"Ah, child, you do not feel as I do. I have delayed the wrench, but now that it must happen, I find the pain is all for me." Tender reproach in his tone.

"I was wondering," she quietly said, "why you ever began, this—ah—kind of thing?" and the words that he had used, so carefully repeated, savoured of insolence in his ears.

A wild little Irish girl, whom Godfrey had honoured by his notice, to dare to mock him! His face flamed.

"*Pour passer le temps*, my dear;" and then the gentlemanly feeling in the man rose in hot revolt at such coarse brutality, and he would have given much to recall the speech.

"Forgive me, Nora!"

She had not even winced. A settling of lines about her mouth, and now a glance of faint inquiry, that was all.

"And why should not the truth be told? The mistake was in not letting me know it weeks ago. But I talk foolishly. How could you then have had my love, and the sight of my trusting happiness to amuse you for a while?"

"Nora, my dear, don't! I spoke in temper; it was cowardly, brutal, and you *know* I have cared for you; but it is impossible that we can be anything more than friends, and I was a scoundrel to forget it."

And Godfrey, strangely shamed and moved, poured forth words of remorse, regret, and affection. He was genuine too. This six weeks' flirtation should never have been, no, not even *pour passer le temps*,

and that excuse in some men's hearts is enough to palliate a great deal. He, a rising barrister, soon to be a Queen's Counsel, marked out for future elevation to the Bench, well born, and a man of the world, had not any right to have won the love of this self-educated girl, who, for all her refined air, was but the daughter of Irish peasants, and in her simplicity and ignorance had evidently thought love-making was always a prelude to marriage!

Nora listened to the speeches that Godfrey's regret now prompted, quite unmoved. Only once was she roused, and that when he spoke of her marrying (as he kindly hoped) some day. Then she lost her calm.

"How dare you imagine me so base! Am I to offer my second-hand affection and my broken trust to an honest man?"

Godfrey was dumb. Such feelings about caresses were unique to him. And how splendid she was in her anger, that, somehow, seemed more against herself than him.

"My dear child," he said, touched by her ideas, and the memory of her resistance that had, unconsciously, been her chief attraction; but then, her trust once gained, no child could have yielded her confidence more simply, or with sweeter generosity given her love.

"My dear child, you are as good and simple as a girl can be! You are over-sensitive—you, at least, have no cause to blame yourself."

She looked at him. "I have loved *you*." And without another word, Nora turned and left him.

Godfrey Graeme bit his lips as he watched her retreating figure upon the rough Irish scenery, and then he laughed aloud.

"Bah! who is unreasonable now? By my soul, not until now, when she hates and despises me, did *I* know how much I care for this strange, lowly-born girl. Her parents may be peasants, but she is a queen herself, and knows it too! She is as much *above* the London doll of society as the same doll would consider her *beneath* it. What a cur I am in her magnificent eyes! I wish I had never seen her, or else had the courage to raise her to my level in the world. What folly! it would never have done! no, no, my pretty Nora; clever, even talented, as I believe you to be, Godfrey Graeme cannot afford to make you his wife."

* * * * *

Ten years later the star of the London season was one Miss Killarn, grand-daughter of Lady Killarn, and, it was whispered, her sole heiress. There was a romantic story, too, afloat, of this young lady's father having made a terrible *mésalliance;* then, disowned by his family, he had died just before his wife gave birth to their child, leaving her utterly destitute, and the poor young woman, broken-hearted and friendless, had only lived on long enough to bring her babe into the world, before she followed her young husband. Some kindly peasant folk, with whom the young couple had lodged in a

lonely part of Ireland, had gladly adopted the infant, and brought her up in entire ignorance that they were not her parents, until an accident brought old Lady Killarn and the girl together. Then the latter's resemblance to her father, her grace and talents, had at once won the old lady's heart, and she claimed her grand-daughter from the distressed peasants, whom, however, nothing would ever induce Nora to ignore or neglect. She had spent a little of the year with them until this season, so the story ran, but could do so no longer, on account of their death through fever, which she, herself, had risked in order to be near them to the last.

Miss Killarn appeared cold enough in society ; quite different from the average Irishwoman, people said ; but nevertheless she was a success, as indeed she could hardly fail to be, when beauty, wit, position and money were arrayed in all their power to win her the homage of the male sex, and the envy of her own.

It was a source of wonder that she had never married during the years she had spent travelling about with Lady Killarn, but it was fully expected that this London season would end in a magnificent wedding ; for though it was, strange to say, Miss Killarn's first visit to the Metropolis, she appeared to have quickly conquered the eligible Godfrey Graeme, the leading Queen's Counsel of the day, and hitherto considered unassailable in his confirmed bachelorhood.

The progress of the affair was watched with the keenest interest by society at large, and this feeling reached its height at a *soirée*, given by Lady Killarn, when Godfrey Graeme's marked attention, and the heiress's reception of the same, gave rise to the impression that the courtship would reach a climax to-night, and the betrothal become sealed.

If some of the fair women present envied Miss Killarn her conquest of the handsome man, with his well-assured position in the world, his courtly air and proud bearing, it is certain that every man envied *his* chances of success with the acknowledged belle of the season, who apart from her wealth possessed such unusual powers of witchery. She was not so very young, and in no way affected youth, but thirty years sit lightly upon the shoulders of a lovely woman especially when she allows them to rest there comfortably, without any ungraceful effort of hers to shift the weight, that must, in the latter case, become a noticeable burden, drawing attention by the very arts that are used to hide its existence. To-night she was no longer cold, her grey eyes were humid, tender, changing, darkening with intensity of feeling, and almost unearthly in their flashes of light.

Her face, framed in her dark hair, was unusually pale, but it was the clear warm pallor that an artist loves, and contrasted well with the mobile scarlet mouth and delicately tinted nostrils. It was a face of intelligence and power that might have been *pretty* in girlhood, but certainly claimed a better description now than the word that can be

applied to any regular, inane features, and pink and white complexion.

"Nora!"

Godfrey Graeme and Miss Killarn were alone upon the terrace; behind them the glare of gas and the crowded rooms, facing them the pale light of the moon, and peaceful hush of night in early summer.

"Nora, I have never dared to mention the past to you before, but I *must* to-night, for I want to thank you for your generous forgiveness, and to ask you to crown it with the promise, Nora, queen of women, to be my wife!"

As in the dead past, he was holding her hands, but it was not with the touch of old, and no woman could have failed to recognise that here was love in such strength as few men are capable of feeling. Had she had the wealth of Crœsus, or the station of an empress, yet a woman, with a woman's heart, would have said, "This is *love*, not avarice or ambition;" and Nora Killarn knew it, for though, either from their excessive trust or vanity, women may mistake false love for real, it is rarely, if ever, they mistake the real for false, whether it be welcome or not.

"Speak to me, Nora!" His breath was on her cheek, his heart throbbing against her bare shoulder, as he bent down to catch her reply. She was white even to ghastliness, as she lifted her eyes to his face.

"Be reasonable, Godfrey!"

"Reasonable! What has reason to do with love like ours?"

"*Ours!*" and her straight brows were slightly raised.

"Yes, our love," he repeated, sternly. "Would you dare to deny that you have known mine all these weeks since we met again, and would you deny that you have encouraged me in all ways to believe you returned it?"

"No," she answered briefly, but his manner at once changed, and Godfrey caught her to his breast.

"Heaven bless you, my queen; then do not play with me now. I love you, Nora, do you hear? I love you—you—only you. And I do not need your dear voice to tell me that you love me too—for if not, why should you have acted as you have done these happy, happy weeks?"

Nora Killarn put her hands upon her breast, pushing him back so that his eyes looked down into her own, and answered, as he had spoken ten years ago:

"*Pour passer le temps!*"

Godfrey Graeme's arms fell to his side, and she was free.

"So! This is your revenge," he said passionately. "Well, it is a very ample one, and you have played your part successfully; but loving you, as God knows I do at this moment, I wish you had found a way to punish me without sacrificing your own nobility. It was un-

necessary too, for you would have had me at your feet, without lowering your standard of truth."

He left her, as she had once left him, and it seemed to Godfrey Graeme that never before had he realised the degradation of the pastime called by men "*Pour passer le temps!*" He told himself that he was but feeling the same torment that he and his sex so often inflict upon women, and yet he could not forgive the one whom he had thought so noble, for stooping to repay him in his own coin.

He mentally writhed before the half-triumphant, half-pitying glances of comprehension that gazed at his altered demeanour the rest of the evening. He was too proud to at once leave the assembly, as if unable to bear his defeat, and the man's heart was suffering far too much to allow him to appear quite as brilliant and gay as before. How are these things so quickly manifest in Society's eyes? To unobservant ones, Godfrey Graeme and Nora Killarn would have appeared much the same in their conduct one to another, and yet, in no time, the whisper had gained every ear that "she had refused him after all," and many a buried hope in other manly breasts was fanned to life by the report; but Nora Killarn grew colder than ever as the weeks passed, and Godfrey Graeme was no longer to be seen in her grandmother's salon.

He had taken the fever of love very badly, they said, as men will when it is delayed to a certain age; but Miss Killarn was proof against contagion and had given her too ardent admirer his *congé*.

The story ought to have ended here of course, but you see it did not. Women's actions are so unaccountable. One would have thought the glory of such a dramatic revenge would have satisfied any female, and that she would then have married some one else, have done with romance, and lived "happy ever after."

Not a bit of it!

"Sad thing about Godfrey Graeme, eh?" Nora Killarn heard, just after entering a theatre with her grandmother, Lady Killarn, to see a *matinée*.

"Lost his eyesight, they say, through an accident with some chemicals. Shocking disfigurement, and of course will terribly interfere with his career."

"Poor fellow!" drawled another speaker. "Well, he's been having a fair innings with the good things of life. Lived pretty well up to the hilt, by the way; doubt if he has saved much of a fortune. If it were me, I'd shoot myself and have done with it."

Here the cynic received a look from the young lady next to him, that plainly said it wouldn't be much of a grief to her if he did it at that moment.

"Don't move, grandmamma," she whispered, "but I'm going home. I shall find the carriage waiting somewhere near, and will send it back in time for you." And before the rather deaf old lady understood Nora's purpose, she had left the theatre. Lady Killarn was used to

her whims, and so settled herself to enjoy the play, to which she supposed Nora had taken an objection.

That young lady drove straight to T—— Street, a mile or two from her own home, and dismissed the carriage.

Her cheeks were burning, and eyes blazing with some sudden resolve.

"Mr. Graeme?" she inquired for, when a man-servant stood before her in answer to an imperious summons at the bell of one of the heavy gloomy houses in T—— Street.

"Is too unwell to be seen, madam."

Most women would have retired; not Nora Killarn.

"He will see me," she said decidedly, "unless he is laid up."

The man hesitated, "No, madam, but his orders are——"

"I am a very old friend," she interrupted. "I can promise that no blame will attach to you for taking me to him unannounced."

Her confident air and pleasant smile overruled the servant's reluctance at such an unusual proceeding, and he led the way to the doctor's study; then, rather scared by the thought of his master's surprise, beat a hasty retreat, as Nora boldly turned the handle and entered.

Godfrey Graeme started. His eyes were bandaged, but he knew this was not the step of a servant.

"Godfrey!"

Dear me! away with pride, conventionalism, and all restriction when a woman sees the man she loves in pain and trouble.

"Godfrey, forgive me! I told you an untruth. It was *not pour passer le temps* that I behaved to you so."

He would have risen, but she was kneeling at his side, her tears falling upon his hands.

"Why have you come to tell me this, Nora? For pity's sake, let there be truth between us now? You have had your revenge. I won't say even that I did not deserve it, but let that hateful French sentence be at rest now, for *surely* it is not to be applied to this scene. Say no, Nora, or such a thought will drive me mad."

For answer she fastened her arms round his neck, and she laid her wet cheek against his forehead.

"No, Godfrey, no, and forgive me for the lie that in my pride I dared to tell. With me, it was and ever will be, '*Je t'aimerai toujours*,' sweetest of all French words. Oh, my darling, forget the past, and let me be your comfort in the present!"

Terribly humble, was it not? I say again, women are not to be depended upon. A little pity will sweep away years of righteous anger, and from avenging goddesses they are transformed into the meekest of yielding, weeping women.

Blind? No, it was only temporary. Perhaps Nora's kisses cured him; at any rate his accident won Godfrey Graeme the subjection of as loyal a heart as ever lived. Let us hope he never tried it again.

IN THE DAYS OF OUR YOUTH.

Ah me! the days when we were young and hopeful,
And life a happy dream,
When all the world was one wide pleasure-palace,
How long ago they seem!
So long ago—yet gazing sadly backwards
Down through the vale of tears,
We see them, as in some enchanted mirror—
Those sunny childish years.

The old home rises up before our vision,
The first home that we knew—
The glen, the wood, the pleasant laden orchard,
The copse where violets grew:
Then flowers were all the wealth of earth we longed for,
And kingcups were our gold,
We had no weary cares, no anxious troubles,
In those brave days of old.

The world lay all before, a glowing pageant,
Each day an added joy;
The future woo'd with its half-hinted glory
The eager girl and boy:
While dreams of noble love and deeds heroic
Played each in turn their parts,
And coming years foretold but Hope's fulfilment
To young and joyous hearts.

Ah me! those gallant hopes, those tender visions,
Are faded now and cold;
From youth we stepped into the strife of manhood,
Then found that we were old!
And though life brought its goodly gifts and precious,
It also brought its pain,
Joys vanished, love that never knew its crowning,
And battles fought in vain.

The noon is past, and slowly to the westward
Moves the declining sun,
We cannot hope to find the morning's freshness
When day is well-nigh done;
Life still is good, and even yet may bring us
Success and love and praise;
But only Heaven can give us back the gladness
Of those dear bygone days!

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

"IT IS THE HEAT," SAID MAUD, LOOKING CAREFULLY AT THE DRAWING.
"YOU CAN FINISH IT AT HOME."

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1893.

MR. WARRENNE:

MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT THE RUINS.

"NOW, Mr. Courtenay," said Florence, as soon as they were on the high-road, "I believe I fear those walls; I never dare speak under that roof—don't you think I could be a governess?"

Mr. Courtenay looked at her in surprise. What is she up to now? thought he. It would take two lifetimes to make out any one woman, I believe.

"Tell me," said Florence, "because you are the only friend I have. Ah! you ought to thank me. I do not believe there is a man so cold as to be insensible to the happiness of obtaining a woman's undivided heart—a heart that has known no other impression. Surely this is not so much a matter of romance as of plain sense. I can admit a woman to be a very valuable possession; but surely she is enhanced by being entirely your own—her past and her future equally devoted to one object!"

"Miss Reynolds, you are as much a coquette as ever," said Courtenay; "you are determined that I should prize you most in losing you."

"Oh, no! I wish you a happier fate; but tell me how people set about these things—people in real want—how do they get a situation?"

"My dear Florence, there is no likelihood of your being reduced to such a strait. Mr. Reynolds may perhaps be very angry, but he will never make good his threat. I only wait your commands to speak to him—I will try to reduce him to terms."

"Ah! you do not know my father!"

"Very few men are a mystery, I assure you. Shall I attack him after dinner?"

"No—wait—let us wait a few days; we do not know what may happen."

"Whenever you please," said Courtenay. "Where do you wish to go?"

"All places are alike to me," said Florence.

"Then, as I have a choice, I will turn off here," said Courtenay. "I made young Warrenne promise to draw me a sketch hereabouts. I shall see if he has forgotten all about it."

Florence made no reply. They were driving in the direction of the Roman arch.

As they leisurely ascended the hill, they came in sight of Leonard, who was seated on a fragment of the old wall, drawing, with Maud half-kneeling by his side, looking over his work. Courtenay stopped the carriage at the top of the hill and got out.

"I vote that we make a halt here," said he, offering his hand to Florence to alight; "the ponies will stand."

Leonard took off his hat and came towards them, leaving his drawing in the hands of Maud.

Florence, in her agitation, replied to his salutation by a bow so slight and hurried that it was hardly perceptible. Leonard felt her apparent coldness, and did not attempt to address her.

"Can you find Miss Reynolds a seat?" said Courtenay, "without deranging you," he added to Maud, who rose when they came close to her.

Maud spread a thick plaid upon the ruined wall, and invited Miss Reynolds to take her seat on it.

"It is not really damp, except for delicate people," she said; "but I am afraid that at present you must be classed among the invalids."

"You are very kind," said Florence, sinking down. "I am not very strong just now."

Maud, surprised at the gentleness of her manner, glanced earnestly at her face—and was shocked to see how ill she looked. In fact, the scene of the morning had done Florence no good—instead of exerting herself, she ought to have been on the sofa. Of the whole party Maud was the only one who felt at ease. Florence was overcome, Leonard was wretched, and Courtenay, though he would not have confessed it to himself, felt some embarrassment at finding himself again in Maud's society.

"Let's see the drawing," said Courtenay.

Leonard handed it to him.

"Capital!" said Courtenay. "Had you any hand in this, Miss Warrenne?"

"No, indeed!" said Maud. "I don't encourage his idleness. I would not do a stroke for him."

"You once took a sketch of this arch," said he.

"Yes—ages ago," returned Maud, laughing a little as she remembered the scene.

"Go on," said Courtenay, pointing to the sketch. Leonard took up his pencil.

"Don't make that too green," said Maud, seated close to Leonard.

Florence remained drooping and silent. Her little teasing cough was more troublesome than usual.

"I am quite distressed to hear you cough so much," said Maud.

"Thank you; it is not of any real consequence," replied Florence, gently.

"Worrying," remarked Courtenay.

"Just that," replied Florence, with a smile.

Maud looked as if she thought them the very strangest lovers she had ever heard of.

Leonard seemed on the point of speaking, but did not.

"I cannot go on, Maud; do you," he said presently, giving her his sketch; "my hand shakes."

"It is the heat," said Maud, looking carefully at the drawing. "You can finish it at home. You have got in all your effects."

"You are determined not to put your hand to it, I see that," said Courtenay in a low tone to Maud.

She looked up at him, but she could not help colouring; so she rose, and began to collect together all Leonard's drawing materials.

"I do dislike people who fancy themselves so very penetrating," she said, as if to herself, but quite loud enough for Courtenay to hear. He laughed.

"I'll tell you where you sat," said Courtenay: "a little higher up—just here."

"So I did," said Maud moving a few steps forward; "I remember that angle of Forrel Court."

"How little you then thought it would be your brother's," remarked Courtenay.

"I can hardly believe it now," said Maud.

"Who lives in that red-brick house, out towards Erlsmede?" asked Courtenay.

"The Stapyltons; don't you know them?"

"I may have seen them. Any daughters?"

"Four."

"Handsome?"

"I don't know at all. Are they handsome, Leonard?"

"I had rather have your opinion," said Courtenay; "not that I have a choice in the present case, for Moonshine there does not hear a word we are saying."

Leonard, not being able to muster courage to address Miss Reynolds, was gathering the beautiful little blossoms of the cistus, which grew in profusion on the bank.

"You will see them, I hope, when you come to Leonard's ball,' said Maud.

"Is he going to give a ball?" asked Courtenay, laughing.

"Mrs. Stapylton has insisted on it," returned Maud.

"And of dancing with her four daughters?"

"Of course. You will dance with me at this ball, will you not?"

"With pleasure," returned Maud.

"The first quadrille?"

"No; the second."

"Are you engaged for the first?"

"No."

"Then, I claim it!"

"And I tell you the second."

Courtenay only smiled incredulously.

"Well then, I'll compromise the matter," said Maud.

"No; I will not have a compromise."

"Mr. Courtenay, you are, without exception, the most obstinate person; and I only wonder——"

She glanced at Florence, and stopped.

"You only wonder! Come, finish."

"Whether it is going to rain—look towards the south, Leonard."

Like all places within a few miles of the sea, they were liable to sudden showers and sea-fogs. A mass of black clouds was drifting owards them.

"We shall have a heavy storm," said Leonard, starting up. "You must make haste and get under shelter—you will be wet through!"

"Thank you, I don't much mind it," said Courtenay, affecting to consider that Leonard's anxiety was entirely on his account. Maud hastened to wrap Florence in the large plaid.

"You must not get wet with that cough," said Maud; "this will protect you completely, if that man will only make haste."

"I shall make all sail for Forrel Court," said Courtenay; "that is by far the nearest house."

"Oh, don't," whispered Florence, looking at him imploringly.

"You must not get wet," said Courtenay; "I could not allow it. Forrel Court is only half a mile off; and it is beginning to rain already."

"We will follow you," said Leonard.

"But we can take Miss Warrenne," said Courtenay.

"No!" said Maud, drawing back.

"Oh, do," said Florence; "see there is plenty of room."

Leonard handed her in, the carriage dashed away; he set off to walk home through the fields.

The rain came down heavily, and Maud's muslin dress was soon wet through. Florence wished to share the plaid with her, but she steadily refused it.

"It will save one, but it will be of no use for two," said she; "and I don't care for the rain—in that respect I resemble Mr. Courtenay,

"Do you never take cold?" said Courtenay.

"Very seldom."

"There is another point of resemblance," said Courtenay.

"Don't find any more, please!" said Maud, earnestly.

Florence could not help laughing at her manner.

"Now leave me to do the honours," said Courtenay, as he drew up before the door, and handed out the ladies; "you ought to change your dress directly."

"Light a fire in the drawing-room," said Maud to the servant who was taking the wet plaid; "and get some hot wine and water at once. I shall be down in one minute," she added, turning to Courtenay; "I would not trust you to take care of any one."

She came back just as the wine and water was ready, and the fire blazing up.

Florence had not entirely escaped; her bonnet had got very wet, and her long ringlets hung damp and uncurled round her face. She looked wretchedly ill—almost blue with cold, and her beautiful aquiline nose "as sharp as a pen."

Maud, on the contrary, seemed refreshed by the shower; her colour was heightened, and her smooth bands of hair did not suffer from the wet. Mr. Courtenay glanced from one to the other with an expression that she could not venture to make out—it almost seemed as if he was drawing a comparison in her favour, yet that she thought could not be. One thing was quite clear to her, that he behaved to her now just as he had done when they had met before his engagement, and when he had acted so strangely, particularly in his last interview, that she had almost fancied if she had encouraged him, he would have made her a declaration. But his present conduct proved her mistake—he must have had some strange fancy for her good opinion, she supposed, and as she recalled that scene, which had often since been present to her thoughts, she blushed a little at her inexperience, which had led her so to mistake his intention. She had read in books of ladies who had anticipated an offer when none was intended to be made; and she remembered with thankfulness, that however awkwardly she might have conducted herself, she had said nothing which might lead him to think she had come to such a conclusion. She now watched his manner to Florence with some curiosity. He gave her some negus, and told her to drink plenty of it if she wished to escape a bad cold; he then offered his services to Maud, which she rejected; after which he threw himself into an arm-chair and took up the paper.

Leonard now joined them; he was perfectly attentive as master of the house, rang to hasten the luncheon, mended the fire, and inquired with exactly a proper degree of interest after Miss Reynolds.

It was awkward, meeting her in his own house—the home that, if she had once acted differently, he would have felt so much pleasure in offering to her. A home, too, that would have satisfied the most

fastidious woman. If she had but felt with him, if she could but have had patience, things would now perhaps be different. He tried to feel that she was not worthy of him; he made an effort to throw off the dejection which he felt in her presence.

"Well, what tidings?" he asked, seeing Courtenay poring over a German paper.

"I was reading an account of a concert at Dresden, at which our old acquaintance, Mademoiselle Mohr, assisted," said Courtenay, throwing down the paper.

"She's a fine singer," said Leonard.

"Ah! Do you remember that evening when we saw her in *Norma?*" asked Courtenay.

"That evening—yes," said Leonard, and he shuddered.

Florence blushed crimson; and Courtenay, recollecting the fatal circumstance attached to that representation, remained silent, leaning his head on his hand.

"Still raining!" said Maud, turning to look out of the window, as she passed on to a little ebony work-table which was evidently reserved for her use.

Courtenay rose and followed her.

"Is that a good piano?" he asked.

"Yes, the sweetest tone in the world."

"Perhaps, as there does not seem much conversation going on," said Courtenay, glancing at Leonard and Florence, who were seated silently at opposite sides of the fire, "you will let me hear it."

"To be sure," said Maud. She sat down and played a waltz.

"Ah, that reminds me," said Courtenay; "let us have something definitely settled about the ball."

"Yes, let us," said Maud, starting up.

"Come, I shall have a coadjutor in you, at last!" said Courtenay.

"That you may depend upon," said Maud, laughing; "on every subject that I particularly desire myself."

"We were talking of the ball you are going to give here, Moonshine," said Courtenay, coming up to Leonard.

Leonard turned round, all astonishment.

"Yes, dear," said Maud; "it appears it is the duty of every enlightened young man, to give a ball to his neighbours, now and then, especially when he has a drawing-room eighty feet long."

"Particularly when he refuses to marry any of the young ladies about," added Courtenay; "he owes them that slight compensation."

Florence glanced hastily at him as Courtenay spoke, and turned away as quickly. She saw that his eyes were fixed upon her.

"If anybody would take the trouble off my hands," said Leonard.

"What say you, Miss Warrenne?" asked Courtenay.

"I will, if you will," said Maud, laughing.

"Done!" said Courtenay.

"Not that I know in the least what to do," said Maud, still laughing.

"We shall make it out between us," said Courtenay; "but you had better put up a placard on his chimney-piece, to signify to him that he is to give a ball on such a day, or he will forget all about it, and ramble off to Sweden or New Zealand."

"I shall remind him," said Maud; "it will be very amusing."

A little scented note was now brought in to Maud from Mrs. Reynolds, pleading the rain as an excuse for not calling, and pressing her to spend a few days at Heathfield, before she returned to Erlsmede.

"It is exceedingly kind," said Maud; "but I cannot. Papa will want me."

"Not if he comes here," said Leonard; "do go—I should so like to have my father staying with me."

"You won't do for papa; you don't know his ways," said Maud.

"He has no ways," replied Leonard.

"Why, he absolutely wants to get rid of me!" exclaimed Maud.

"Like the mothers we were talking of," said Courtenay.

"I should be truly glad if you would come, Miss Warrenne," said Florence; "it would be a comfort to me."

Times were changed indeed! Maud looked at her pale face, and accepted at once.

The weather had cleared by this time, and Florence and Courtenay rose to return home.

"We shall see you to-morrow in time for dinner," said Florence to Maud.

"And please to remember that you are engaged to me for the first quadrille," said Courtenay, as he left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

INDECISION.

As soon as the afternoon service was over, Leonard drove his sister to Heathfield, according to her promise. He did not get out of the carriage, although Mrs. Reynolds had forewarned whoever might receive him to beg that he would dine with them. He simply left his compliments and regrets that he was expected back to dinner. Mrs. Reynolds, in all her delight at receiving Maud, could not help mingling a few little reproaches that she had not managed to detain her handsome brother. A little coaxing on her part would certainly have done it—and all women knew how to coax.

"No, Leonard was expecting papa," said Maud. "I could not have persuaded him to be absent when papa arrived."

"And now it is time to dress, and Miss Warrenne has not seen baby. Come with me, we will pay a visit to the nursery as we go, my dear Maud."

Mrs. Reynolds took Maud's arm and led her off, exclaiming as they went upstairs:

"How wonderfully well you are looking, and so charmingly dressed. That little bonnet, my dear, and what a beautiful silk—don't you love that style of trimming—I wish it would never go out! Don't you think poor Florence looks sadly? Between you and me, those very brilliant blondes always go off early—always. What a mercy it is that her marriage was arranged before she got so pale; and Mr. Courtenay, who is the best of men, does not care a straw whether she is white or black—he told me so himself—he said he did not marry her for her complexion—one evening, when she looked absolutely sallow, my dear. What does he marry her for, I wonder?"

By this time they had reached the nursery door. Mrs. Reynolds paused with the handle in her hand and added, almost in a whisper:

"Between ourselves, Florence does not absolutely dote on her future; but what is to be done? You can't have everything; but I shall be glad for her, poor girl, when it is over and settled, because she naturally wishes to put it off, and when there is no help for it, I daresay she will be very happy."

"What a prospect!" thought Maud, as they entered the nursery. The little Lyles overwhelmed her with caresses. Mrs. Reynolds drew her gently away.

"There, there, my darlings, don't quite eat up Miss Warrenne, because I want her to look at little darling brother."

Maud instantly pronounced him to be the finest child she had ever seen; and as her experience among the infant tribe was not very extensive, this assertion was tolerably sincere.

They loitered away so much time in the nursery that Maud feared she would be late; but when she came downstairs the drawing-room was vacant.

She took up a book, and drew her chair near the window. There was a broad walk which extended all along that side of the house, covered overhead by a verandah hung with all sorts of creeping plants. Courtenay and Florence, already dressed, were walking up and down this walk. They were talking in a low voice, but everything was so still that Maud could not avoid catching a few sentences.

"Then I shall speak to-day after dinner?" asked Courtenay, with something of impatience in his manner.

"No, not yet, pray, Mr. Courtenay; we shall have such a scene."

"But why not now? What is the use of driving it off?"

"We don't know what may happen," murmured Florence.

"What do you expect will happen? Do you think we are likely to be the subject of a miracle?" asked Courtenay, drily.

"No, but we cannot tell—perhaps—"

"Are you playing with me?" said Courtenay, quickly, as if struck with a sudden suspicion. "Do you mean it?"

"Good heavens! do I mean it?" exclaimed Florence, almost with a cry.

"Well, then, to-day?"

"No, only a very few days—a week."

Courtenay turned round with a gesture of impatience that seemed to be beyond his control, and entered the window abruptly.

"He has been trying to make her fix the day," thought Maud, "and he can't succeed. It *is* provoking!"

Florence, looking flushed and agitated, walked to the other side of the room, as if to get as far as possible from Mr. Courtenay. He threw a glance at her, not very affectionate in its character, and took a chair by Maud.

At this moment Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds came in, accompanied by the curate, Mr. Meek.

Mr. Reynolds offered his arm to Maud; Mr. Meek took Mrs. Reynolds; Courtenay went up to Florence.

"If we begin to quarrel," he whispered, as they crossed the hall, "there are some hopes for me."

"Oh! be friends!" said Florence.

"Well, if you put it off till it is too late, don't lay the blame on me!" returned Courtenay, as they took their seats at the table.

Mr. Reynolds was much pleased to see his daughter and her lover on such confidential terms; he spoke to Florence very kindly several times during dinner.

"You are in favour at the bottom of the table to-day," said Courtenay, ironically.

"Yes," said Florence, blushing; "he thinks that we—he sees that—I—"

"Will you take some wine?" said Courtenay, laughing at her confusion.

Dinner was always a long business at Heathfield. Mr. Reynolds' cook was famous, and he liked his entertainments to be splendid.

It was nine o'clock before the ladies rose from table. Mrs. Reynolds went straight up into the nursery, leaving the young ladies *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room.

After a few commonplace sentences, Florence, taking courage from the twilight, for the lamps were not yet lit, said to Maud, with rather an uncertain voice:

"Is your brother pleased with Forrel Court?"

"He would be very fastidious, if he were not!" said Maud. "Yes, he is delighted with it. He is so fond of the country that he means always to live there, except when he goes abroad for a little change."

"Report has not spared his name, as you might expect," said Florence, her voice becoming still less firm; "he has been given already to one of the Miss Stapyltons."

"No! do you know to which of them?" exclaimed Maud; "that would be too absurd! That would be pitiful of Leonard—girls who, I give you my word, would have felt themselves insulted if he had dared to speak to them before he came into his fortune—girls who treated him, not as a gentleman with the blood of the old Normans in his veins, but as a simple merchant's clerk! There is not a word of truth in *that* report, however! Besides, Leonard declares he will never marry!"

Florence felt that this last remark touched her nearly; but she managed to say:

"Young men's declarations on that subject are seldom to be taken literally."

"Oh! no," returned Maud, "he means it now; but I have a sort of hope, a kind of presentiment—however, time will show!"

Florence longed to ask who Maud suspected of having made some impression on her brother; but at that moment the gentlemen came in, the lamps were lit, the tea and coffee carried round; Mrs. Reynolds descended from the nursery, and conversation became general.

As soon as the last coffee-cup had disappeared, Maud was requested to sing. She asked for a volume of "Handel," and placing herself at the piano, she began that exquisite lament of Jephtha's daughter, "Ye sacred Priests."

Courtenay, standing near her, listened as those listen whose love of music is a passion; but he made no remark when she had finished.

Mr. Reynolds was loud in his commendations; Mrs. Reynolds nodded to Mr. Meek, and reminded him that she had promised him a treat. Mr. Meek, who was a little, sly-looking man, with an unbounded opinion of himself, stalked up to Maud, inquired who was her master, and then turning over the leaves, begged her to sing, "Rejoice greatly."

It was a difficult undertaking, but her fresh, elastic voice seemed to master the most intricate passages without an effort. Mr. Meek assured her that she had sung it extremely well, and found another in the same style — "From mighty kings." Maud sang it with the same ease, and then remarked laughingly that as she had tired the whole company, including herself, she hoped that some one else would kindly supply her place. Mr. Reynolds politely declared that it was impossible for any one to venture after such singing as he had just heard, and added, for his daughter's benefit, that it would be well if all young people turned their time to account as Miss Warrenne had done, for that such a delightful talent as hers was a perpetual source of enjoyment to a family circle.

For Mr. Reynolds firmly believed that an equal amount of application would always produce an equal amount of excellence—a theory that is daily confuted by experience, but which it suited him to hold, and therefore he was not likely to alter it.

It was a great amusement to Maud to watch Florence and Mr.

Courtenay; she was in a perpetual puzzle at their manner to one another: it was such a complete contrast to anything she had seen in Alice and Captain Scudamore, and her experience of engaged people went no further. There was certainly something confidential at times in their way of speaking to each other, which contradicted their general indifference.

"Florence is actually coming down this morning," said Mrs. Reynolds, as they began to assemble in the breakfast-room; "you must take that as a particular compliment to yourself, my dear Maud."

"I'm much obliged," said Maud, smiling.

"What am *I* to be?" asked Courtenay.

"Mortified, of course," replied Mrs. Reynolds, with her pretty little laugh.

"Well, how are you?" asked Courtenay, as Florence entered.

"Oh, pretty well," replied Florence, looking graciously round; "good-morning; isn't it going to be very hot to-day?"

"Do you know, Florence dear, you look quite blooming?" said Mrs. Reynolds. "I was in hopes Mr. Courtenay was going to remark it."

"I knew you would save me the trouble," replied Courtenay.

Florence laughed a little and drew her chair to the table.

"If I were Miss Reynolds, I would make you pay well for that speech," said Maud.

"Miss Reynolds does not mind it," said Courtenay.

"That does not excuse you!" retorted Maud.

"I so enjoy a quarrel," said Courtenay, handing her a plate with a slice of ham upon it.

"I never eat meat for breakfast," said Maud, putting it away.

"That is because I cut it for you," said Courtenay.

"Think so, if you like," returned Maud.

"Shall we see our friend Leonard to-day, do you think?" asked Courtenay.

"No, he will be with papa."

"I thought he might possibly come to look after you," remarked Courtenay.

"What, do you mean to say I want looking after?" exclaimed Maud.

"Think so, if you like," retorted Courtenay.

"Miss Reynolds, will you tease him?" said Maud.

The entrance of Mr. Reynolds, looking very grim and starched, put a stop to this sort of talk.

Mr. Courtenay began a sensible conversation with him on the weight of the atmosphere, which he seemed greatly to enjoy, and quoted largely in his turn from a recent work on pneumatics.

Florence became dumb. Mrs. Reynolds, whose spirit of enjoyment seemed boundless, sat listening with a look as if she said, "How very nice!" although every word they uttered was Hebrew to her.

As soon as breakfast was over, Mr. Reynolds went straight to his study to write letters. Mrs. Reynolds hastened to the nursery to see the children, after promising Maud that she should certainly see baby washed before she left; and Florence rose to take Maud round the garden.

"Don't go out just yet," said Courtenay, who was reading the paper; "I shall be with you in a minute."

"Well, what next?" cried Maud, throwing back her beautiful little head like a bird. "What a life I would lead that man, if I were in your place!" she added, as they went out upon the lawn.

"How I wish you were," sighed Florence.

"Come, now we must begin to arrange about this ball," said Courtenay, as he joined them in the garden.

"If you can descend from your hydrostatics!" retorted Maud, laughing.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BALL.

"You are not going to Erlsmede," said Leonard, when he called for his sister the next day, "you are going back with me. My father has agreed to stay with me for some time, and, besides, I'm not very well. I really wish to consult him."

Perhaps at this time few persons in the United Kingdom were blessed with more perfect health than he enjoyed; but as paragons of perfection are seldom to be met with out of books, Leonard, who had much of the refinement and sensibility of character that belongs to a woman, wanted something of the energy and resolution that looks well in a man.

The duties of a man of large fortune are important, but they are rather indefinite. Leonard had every wish to fulfil his duties, he had a deep sense of the responsibility of life, but he was rather supine. Things which could be done any day, were put off from week to week. He fancied he had not time to execute plans, and to examine accounts, which when he was really employed from morning till night he would have despatched in a leisure half-hour.

Maud fretted over this want of activity: her rapid mind could not endure to pause over any project once started. She wished that Leonard's estate should be a model, that his schools, and almshouses, and farms should all be quoted as unexceptionable. She lamented deeply the torpor that seemed to obscure his faculties. A little light literature, a little sketching of the neighbouring scenery, a great deal of dawdling and gossiping with the gardeners, a few attempts to make himself acquainted with botany and horticulture: these slight occupations seemed to fill up his day. But as they did not furnish quite employment enough for a rational being, Leonard provided himself with

another source of daily interest. He fancied himself an invalid. He had spent the interval of Maud's absence at Heathfield in trying to convince his father that his lungs were absolutely gone. The whole college of physicians would have been puzzled by the variety of extraordinary symptoms which he urged in support of this idea.

Mr. Warrenne smiled over these contradictory statements, refused to prescribe anything, and turned the subject whenever he could.

Mr. Courtenay seemed to think this notion of Leonard's such an excellent jest that he humoured it in every possible way, and spent some time in endeavouring to persuade him that he was the victim of a variety of other fatal complaints.

"It was all very well to fancy himself ill when he was at that gloomy office," said Maud, one day when Courtenay called in as usual to arrange about the ball, and Leonard was at another table, answering notes: "but now it's too provoking when he has everything he could desire."

"A happy individual," said Courtenay; "are you equally favoured by fortune?"

"No," retorted Maud, "how can I be comfortable when I see him dreaming away his time as he does. Ill—it would serve him right to have a fit of illness in good earnest."

"And then how some of us would fret," said Courtenay.

"Not you for one," replied Maud.

"No, you would fret enough for both of us," returned Courtenay.

"Who have accepted, Leonard dear?" said Maud, crossing over quickly to her brother.

Leonard took up a large handful of open notes that lay before him and gave them to his sister. They were the answers to the invitations which had been duly sent out.

"No refusals!" he laughed. "But I'm sure I am as little in a condition to go through a ball as any one."

"Poor victim!" said Courtenay; "shall I run for Mr. Warrenne? I see him standing out by the conservatory."

"Don't tease him," said Maud.

"He had better drive over to Heathfield the night of the ball, to keep Miss Reynolds company," said Courtenay, "and leave you and me to do the honours."

"That would be so very correct," replied Maud.

"And when we returned to Heathfield, we should find that the two invalids had departed," added Courtenay.

Leonard took up a book and seemed to be reading very attentively.

"But we *shall* see Miss Reynolds, I hope," said Maud.

"Yes, the father, who does not allow any illness in his house, has decreed that all go; to the great rejoicing of Mrs. Reynolds, who is glad to secure a little gaiety now and then."

"Heathfield is rather dull," said Maud.

"And lovers proverbially so," added Courtenay.

Maud smiled; she thought there were no lovers at Heathfield.

"Now if you and I were to make it out together," said Courtenay, "we would have none of that nonsense."

"What nonsense?" asked Maud.

"Keeping company, to be sure," said Courtenay.

"What a wicked sneer you have," said Maud.

"I bow to the compliment," said Courtenay.

"There is no one who provokes me so much as you," said Maud.

"I am glad of it," said Courtenay. "I could not provoke you once."

"You always did," cried Maud.

"Then I was a fool not to follow it up," said Courtenay, hastily. "What is our friend reading?"

"Some dissertation on the genius of Pope," said Maud, looking over him.

"The old question, I suppose—whether Pope was a poet," remarked Courtenay.

"What do you think on the subject?" asked Maud, who had now taken up her work.

"I never thought about it," replied Courtenay. "He was a man of genius—no one can deny that—his essays are only a little less brilliant than those of Bacon; and as to whether the world has a poet more or less, it is a question of no importance whatever."

"Oh, of course you undervalue poets," said Maud. "You don't consider a great poet a blessing to all ages. Just like you."

Here she went on very busily with her work for a few minutes; a complicated fabric of silks. Presently she began again:

"I hate a good many things in this world. It is a very mean world. Once it was a very wicked world, but I do declare now it's chiefly mean. But I hate nothing so much as a person who does not value poetry. But people who never feel can't be expected to comprehend what is, after all, only the language of feeling."

"Then you should not hate them," said Courtenay, drily. "Not but that you are very welcome to hate me. It is worth being hated to make your eyes flash—they absolutely rain fire."

Maud crimsoned to the temples. Leonard, who was reading with his head resting on his hand said languidly, "How you two always quarrel."

"And you forget," said Courtenay, "that there is some poetry which is not merely the language of emotion—it appeals to the senses of the intellect—it delights the ear by its harmonious diction—it calls up before the mind what painting and sculpture represent to the eye. I can admire that kind of poetry, Miss Warrenne, though I confess I never cry myself to sleep over a book, like the young man you admire so much in 'Rokeby.'"

"I?"

"Yes; are you not an advocate for the soft sensibilities of Master Wilfred?"

"No—and yet," said Maud, "I prefer even Wilfred to the callous,

sneering people one meets with in the present day, who have not the power of being touched by anything noble, or melted by anything pathetic; and who yet grow very angry if you don't give them credit for the virtues which they profess to disclaim."

"Ah!" said Courtenay, taking out his watch, "my time's up now. I must go and do the agreeable at Heathfield!"

"You have only to be the exact opposite of what you are here," said Maud, as they shook hands, "and you can't fail to be charming!"

Yet when he was gone she felt rather dull. She could not quarrel with Leonard, so she asked him to take a ride with her; but she thought with some satisfaction, as she buttoned her habit, "He will be sure to come to-morrow."

* * * * *

The day of the ball came at last. Mr. Courtenay rode over to Forrel Court in the morning to ask if everything was arranged, and Maud got up a little quarrel with him because he refused to tell her what Miss Reynolds was to wear.

He had not the least idea himself what it was to be, but he took care not to put forward this plea for his silence.

When Maud came into the drawing-room that evening in her pink crape dress with floating skirts, and her hair simply adorned with a white camellia, she found Leonard leaning against the mantelpiece, ready dressed. She laid her fan and bouquet on the slab and began to put on her gloves.

"I am so glad you are ready, dear," she said, "I had my misgivings."

"How handsome you look to-night!" said Leonard, raising his head as she addressed him.

Maud made one of her provoking little curtseys.

"Papa is coming in for a few minutes," she said, "and then he means to go quietly off to bed. I have just made his tea for him."

Leonard took up her fan absently.

"How often Courtenay is here," he said.

"About the ball," replied Maud, hastily. "There is a carriage! Mr. Courtenay said that people would take care to be early, when so good a *parti* as yourself gave a ball: the first move might secure the game!"

The Heathfield party were among the earliest comers. Mrs. Reynolds looking lovely in a valuable white lace dress; Florence in a silver muslin, with turquoise ornaments, almost like the Florence Leonard remembered at the Ferns. He hardly ventured to look at her—he remembered only that she had been unwilling to accept the invitation, that she was in his house almost by compulsion. Fortunately he had present occupation in replying to the compliments of Mrs. Reynolds.

"This is really delightful, this is splendid!" she exclaimed.

"Only think! In the midst of the country too, quite in the desert! Nothing could be better, even in London! You have a genius for these things, Mr. Warrenne-Digby. I shall consult you when *I* give a ball!"

Leonard modestly pointed out Mr. Courtenay as the author of the *fête*.

"But then, how good of you to do it! How very charitable! Really, when one thinks of the way most young men go on, and then to see you! It must be such a comfort to your family! I wish you would wait for Lucy."

"With pleasure, if she will promise to grow up like her mother," said Leonard, smiling.

The Thomasons, with Colonel and Mrs. Creswick, were the next arrivals.

Ada looked more beautiful than ever. She wore a straw-coloured crape tunic over a *moire* dress of the same colour, with a simple garniture of bright green leaves, which enhanced the pure paleness of her features, transparent as a cameo, and the raven blackness of her hair.

Florence saw Leonard spring forward to meet her, and engage her for the first dance, almost before Mrs. Thomason could conclude her greeting.

"It is quite a dispensation," she sighed, glancing down the suite of rooms, perfumed with choice plants, and blazing with light; "and I hope you may long live to enjoy it!"

"I hope he may," said Courtenay, drily; "he has not begun yet."

The rooms were filling fast—the music struck up—Mr. Courtenay went to claim Maud for the quadrille.

"Really," she exclaimed, sinking down on a seat, with an air of great weariness, "it *is* hard work to have to teach you your duty. Ought you not to be dancing with Miss Reynolds?"

"She is engaged to Lester Stapylton," said Courtenay.

"And are you going to fight to-morrow morning?" asked Maud, rising.

"Not that I know of."

"There's something very wrong about you," said Maud, shaking her head. "Now take my fan, and my handkerchief, and my *flacon* and my bouquet, and if you drop anything, beware!"

"Anything else?" asked Countenay, carelessly.

"Not at present."

"Then, since I'm loaded, I suppose we may start," he said, moving to the dancers.

Sir Frederic Manning came with the Scudamores, while the quadrille was going forward. The Stapyltons, ranged along the wall, nodded and smiled to him in vain.

Sir Frederic and Maud fell into the circle of waltzers; then Leonard and Mrs. Reynolds; then Ada with one Mr. Tracey, whom everybody

envied her, because he was the second son of a lord. Florence followed with Mr. Lester Stapylton. Miss Albina was tearing round and round with Mr. Sharpe, as if they had been on the treadmill. Everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves very much—as they always do at a ball—but if their feelings could be laid open, it is possible they might not correspond exactly with the outward show.

It was the opinion of the elder ladies that Leonard was paying his addresses to Ada Thomason, and Sir Frederic Manning to Maud. In fact, Sir Frederic had danced with Maud as often as he could find her disengaged; and Leonard had not only danced with Ada several times, but talked with her more than with any other young lady in the room. The friendliness of Mr. and Mrs. Thomason's manner towards him, his intimacy with her cousin, Mr. Courtenay, all seemed to countenance the idea. Many a castle in the air was demolished by the sight of Leonard dancing with Ada Thomason.

"They seem to be getting on very comfortably," said Courtenay to Maud, pointing out his cousin and Leonard, who were standing together beneath a perfect thicket of geraniums, waiting to join the circle of waltzers again, and in the meantime engaged in an earnest conversation.

"Don't they?" said Maud, smiling; "but after this waltz will you remind Leonard to dance with Mrs. Fergusson; she is a bride, and he really forgets."

"Ah!" that reminds me that Mr. Tracey begged me to introduce him to you for the next quadrille."

"I would rather not," said Maud; "I don't wish to be introduced to people just because Leonard has come into Forrel Court. I am satisfied to know those people who were acquainted with me before."

"But this is a little bit of pride, is it not?" said Mr. Courtenay.

"Very likely," returned Maud.

"Why, you surely are not piqued because people let you alone when they thought they could get nothing out of you," said Courtenay; "you never took it in your head that people ought to seek you *for yourself* instead of your dinners and suppers! You never gave them credit for selecting and discriminating, did you, or wishing for anything in the shape of human intercourse instead of herding together like brutes? People? you have indeed been looking for the silk purse where you are only like to find the—— You know the proverb."

"And then you talk to me about pride!" said Maud, laughing.

"The fact is," replied Mr. Courtenay, joining in the laugh, "that you and I are pretty well matched in that respect."

"Then we have both something that ought to be got rid of," said Maud.

"That is a beautiful bouquet of yours," said Courtenay, taking it from her.

"Do you like gardenias?"

"Of all things; I am going to take one of these."

"I don't know that I can spare it."

"And how do you like Miss Reynolds' dress after all?" asked Courtenay, throwing away the carnation that he wore, and replacing it by a gardenia from Maud's bouquet.

"Oh," said Maud, turning round to look, "it's beautiful."

"Miss Warrenne, am I so happy as to find you disengaged?" asked Sir Frederic, approaching her.

"You are that fortunate man, Sir Frederic," said Maud, taking his arm.

Mr. Courtenay remained leaning in one of the windows, watching the dancers. Colonel Creswick went up to Leonard, who was standing before Ada's chair talking to her, and carried him off to be introduced to some lady. Ada rose directly and came hastily across the room to her cousin.

"Well, am I to congratulate you? Everybody says it is a settled thing," said Mr. Courtenay.

"Charles, he has my statue!" exclaimed Ada, sinking on a seat by his side.

"Enlighten me," said Mr. Courtenay, drily.

"He—Sir Frederic; so Mr. Warrenne-Digby tells me—is it possible? do you think it is true?" asked Ada rapidly.

"I will take your word for it," said Courtenay, quietly; "this is the first I have heard of it."

"Think, Charles! He went to Rome on purpose to procure it," exclaimed Ada.

"To Rome, eh?" said Mr. Courtenay, looking down on his cousin's agitated face, and thinking it necessary to make some remark.

"And he has never once asked me to dance, Charles," said Ada, clasping her cousin's hand; "what does he mean—what shall I do?"

"As to what he means, I dare say he does not know himself; few people do," returned Mr. Courtenay. "As to what you should do, why—dance with somebody else."

"Charles, I'm serious—I'm miserable!" said Ada. "Do advise me—there's some misunderstanding that a word would set to rights."

"I have one woman's affairs on my hands now," said Mr. Courtenay; "and they seem to be more than I can quite manage; for Heaven's sake don't give me yours into the bargain!"

"But, Charles, is it reasonable to go all the way to Italy for that statue, and then not to pay me the common courtesy of asking me to dance?"

"Reasonable?—No!" replied Mr. Courtenay.

"Charles, tell papa that I wish to go home directly," cried Ada impatiently.

"And the Creswicks?—they will feel obliged to leave, too; you can't make the move before supper," said Courtenay. "Don't be a child; command yourself!"

The supper-room was opened. Leonard came in search of Ada. Everybody became convinced that she had won the prize. Mrs. Reynolds rallied him upon it as she took her place on the other side of him.

"I'm half angry with you," she whispered; "yes—a little of that mayonnaise, if you please—for not waiting for Lucy! but you will have a very charming little wife!"

"I assure you, Mrs. Reynolds——"

"Yes—rely on my discretion—what, you have not spoken yet! You don't intend? Oh, nonsense! I'll make you an opportunity. You like my coiffure? You think it divine! What a charming creature you are!"

It was a warm moonlight night; one of the latest days of June. The windows of the supper-room opened to the ground, and were left unclosed on account of the heat. Some of the young people fancied they should like a turn upon the terrace. Shawls were brought in haste for the more prudent of the young ladies; the gentlemen accompanied them bare-headed. The terrace, lighted by the lamps from within, was quickly thronged by the guests. Some sat on the low stone parapet that separated the upper from the lower terrace, others sauntered slowly up and down. The moon was just rising behind the stately cedars, and throwing its silver hue on the closely mown lawn. The ladies were eating ices; the gentlemen gathering flowers with the dew upon them, to present to their partners. The music from the ball-room came on the air with a wailing sound.

Ada was seated on the wall, looking at the moon through the cedar boughs.

Leonard was persuading her to dance a galop. She said she was tired; that the night was too warm; that, in fact, she was not in spirits for it—that she had danced enough.

Sir Frederic and Captain Scudamore were passing slowly down the walk.

"A thousand times more beautiful," said Sir Frederic in reply to something his companion remarked.

"I'll dance it with you," said Ada, "if you will find out what those two were talking about as they passed us."

Leonard went directly after Captain Scudamore, and came back with a smile.

"You will forgive me," he said.

"If you have succeeded," replied Ada.

"Well, then—my brother-in-law remarked that you were as handsome as your statue, and Sir Frederic's reply was—"a thousand times more beautiful."

"Come," said Ada, "they are beginning the galop."

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Thomason, coming fussing up to Mr. Courtenay, "there's Ada dancing that galop with Mr. Warrenne-Digby at such a rate—she will tire herself to death. Not that I can have

any objection, you know, Charles, to such a delightful young man, for one moment—every mother must feel gratified, I'm sure—but it will be the death of her. Couldn't you put a stop to it? I've been making signs to her this half-hour."

"My dear aunt," said Mr. Courtenay, drily, "she seems very comfortable; let everybody be happy their own way."

"Ah! Charles, it's easy to talk," sighed Mrs. Thomason, "you are not a mother! Ada had a very bad cough at the beginning of the winter."

As it was now the middle of the summer, this information did not strike dismay into the heart of Mr. Courtenay; he turned to Miss Reynolds, and asked her if she had a mind to join in the galop.

Florence made a sign in the negative.

"They dance well, do they not?" said Courtenay, looking at Ada and Leonard.

"Perfectly," replied Florence.

"You are tired," said Courtenay.

"Wearied almost to death," she replied.

"The joys of a ball!" remarked Courtenay.

"Mr. Courtenay," said Florence, with an abruptness of manner that seemed to reveal the most absolute despair; "Mr. Young, the family lawyer, comes to-morrow about the settlements. If you care to let it all go on—if you are not utterly wearied and disgusted with the engagement—let it be fulfilled—say nothing to my father—he is the best judge, after all."

"Be it so. I am entirely at your orders," said Mr. Courtenay, in a calm voice; but, as he finished speaking, he took the gardenia from his coat and laid it down on the corner of the mantelpiece.

Florence did not see him. She remained looking vacantly at the dancers. Leonard and Ada still, at intervals, flew past her—then her attention seemed quickened for a moment.

"And there you are, all out of breath, and the carriage waiting!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason, as Leonard at last handed her daughter to a seat. "You have been very much admired, my dear, and you never looked better; but how tired you will be to-morrow!"

"Don't believe it, mamma," said Ada. "I have enjoyed myself too much to feel tired. Mr. Warrenne-Digby, I have had a most delightful evening. Did you say the carriage was ready? I won't keep the horses. I never was at such a charming ball in my life!"

She was looking beautiful indeed. The dance had brought a scarlet colour upon the transparent paleness of her cheeks, and her splendid eyes glowed beneath the calm breadth of her low Greek forehead. Two or three purple locks had been loosened by her rapid movements, and fell disordered upon her ivory shoulders.

Sir Frederic followed her hastily into the cloak-room.

"But you are going to wear something more than that?" he said, helping Ada to put on her shawl.

"No, this will do very well," said Ada, wrapping her light *barége* all round her.

Leonard was hanging on the shoulders of Mrs. Thomason a large red velvet opera cloak. A clothes-horse could hardly have made a more efficient screen for people who had any little private remarks to make together. But Sir Frederic remained steadily looking at Ada, without uttering a word. There seemed some difficulty between Mrs. Thomason's turban and the hood of her cloak. At last it was arranged to her satisfaction.

"Now, Ada, there's your papa," she said, moving into the hall.

"Miss Thomason, I wish to Heaven you had not a sixpence in the world!" exclaimed Sir Frederic, standing directly in the doorway.

"So do I, Sir Frederic," replied Ada, raising her magnificent eyes for one moment to his.

Sir Frederic stared at her for a minute, and, to say the truth, he had a very unceremonious stare, and then taking her hand to lead her to the carriage, said hastily:

"Perhaps I may be allowed to call upon Mr. Thomason to-morrow morning?"

Ada had only time for a smile and a little bend of her head; but that was quite enough for any sensible man, and as Mrs. Thorne used to say to him, "You don't want sense; it would be well for you if you didn't want anything else!"

"Well, Leonard dear," said Maud, as they stood together in the deserted rooms, "it's over, at last."

"And I have heard you so much admired, Maud," said Leonard, looking proudly at her.

"And you, Leonard—I'm too tired to repeat all the fine things the ladies said of you."

"Alice looked remarkably pretty," said Leonard.

"So Dick thought," said Maud, laughing. "He told me fairly he thought her the prettiest woman in the room."

"Well, good-night, dear," said Leonard, taking up his candle.

"My gardenia!" exclaimed Maud, pausing as she passed the mantelpiece.

She took it up and went thoughtfully to her room.

(*To be concluded.*)

HIS LETTER.

By Hilda Newman.

HE was in that stage of convalescence when it seems so pleasant to live; when everyone is kind and everything looks new, and the petty daily cares that haunt one in good health are silent and far off. He had been near enough to death to appreciate life; still, he did not wish to get better—at least, not too quickly. The languor of his illness was still upon him, and he was rather fond of being made much of.

There was another reason that made this slow convalescence so desirable, one that he hardly owned to himself as yet, but which was gradually making itself apparent and occupying a conspicuous place in his thoughts. It came into his mind again this morning as he lay in bed lazily watching the pretty nurse while she made the room tidy, the chaos of bottles, glasses, and papers disappeared as if by magic as she moved about swiftly and noiselessly. He languidly admired the slight, graceful figure in its neat, grey uniform, the little golden tendrils of hair peeping from under the snowy-frilled cap, whose long white strings were tied in a bewitching bow under the soft, dimpled chin, the apron that fitted without a crease, and the spotless cuffs that severely bound her supple wrists.

Sometimes she turned a pair of roguish grey eyes on him with some laughing remark, that gave a glimpse of white teeth, and a charmingly curled lip; but he was fain to resent the fascination of her smile, nay, of her very presence, because it was too difficult to resist, and it had to be resisted.

When his mother came in and kissed him, laying a cool hand on his forehead, he blushed like a shame-faced schoolboy, wondering what the pretty nurse thought of this petting; for she was strict, and despised what she called the helpless sympathy of amateur nursing, caring only for the skill and danger of it. And at the same time he became conscious that her opinion was altogether of too much importance to him. His anxiety to please her was growing daily, with all his strength of will he could not succeed in combatting it, and oh, he was so tired of trying—how he longed to yield to that overwhelming, mysterious fascination—to find out whether she cared for him. Her attention was unflagging, and looking back on the moment of consciousness that came at the crisis of his illness, he remembered that those sweet eyes were bent on him with an expression of almost wild anxiety, which, with the conceit of six-and-twenty he did not wholly attribute to the hospital nurse's interest in an exciting case. Yet she had never given him cause to think otherwise. Although she was always pleasant, and often merry, it was difficult to find out what she

really felt, for she gave him no clue, avoiding any conversation about herself or her past life.

Sometimes he thought her shallow, and devoid of facts to communicate; at others he was sure she must be very deep to fence round his polite but insinuating little questions so adroitly. There was no mistaking the keen interest she took in his progress, and yet he often fancied she was sad about it too, as he was, and hugged this thought to his breast, as he sometimes lay awake, through the dreary hours of dawn, with the pretty nurse within call.

The necessity of curbing these fancies and impossible dreams became more apparent to him than ever, as his hand closed over the neat, grey envelope his mother laid before him, whispering, with an arch look, as she turned to go, "I will leave you alone now, dear."

As if being in the same room with that distracting little figure could be called alone! And somehow he did not wish her to see this note at all. He was almost glad, when, after a final pat to his pillow, the pretty nurse bade him laughingly "good-night," and retired to her matutinal couch, where, he fondly hoped, she sometimes dreamt of him. He opened the dainty missive sent to him by his betrothed.

"My dearest," she wrote, "now that you are getting well again, I shall expect to hear from you more often. Your mother has been very good to me in our mutual anxiety and trouble, writing news of you every day. Oh, my darling, I can never be grateful enough that you have been spared to me. Shall I ever forget the night I spent waiting for your mother's telegram when we thought you could not live! I knew then for the first time that I had been too happy. Blessed with the love of the best and truest man on earth"—he winced—"with dear parents and friends—with health and wealth, and everything my heart desired. I was too selfish, dear, to be grateful; I was not worthy of you, but God has made me worthy. That night of agony and prayer has humbled me to the dust. You are a thousand times more precious to me, my love, since I have feared to lose you. Be careful of your health now, for my sake, until I can take care of you altogether. As soon as your mother will let me, I will come to you."

The last words of this letter haunted him throughout the day; with the anticipation of this visit from her, came the vague, unformed fancy that she and the pretty nurse would not like each other, and this slow, mysterious, but intoxicating train of thought he had been allowing himself to glide into, would receive a rude shock—that he would rather they did not meet—*that he would rather she did not come.* The floating idea resolved itself into this at last, and he was horrified at the result of his cogitations.

That night he woke suddenly from a confused dream in which she came to him in a nurse's uniform and bade him a tearful good-bye, while the pretty nurse, in a familiar silken dinner-gown, elaborately trimmed, stood at the door and smilingly beckoned him away.

As he opened his eyes, by the carefully-screened soft light, he saw a figure kneeling at his bedside—it was the pretty nurse. Her face was hidden, but he knew the feathery golden hair, and the little, white, deft-fingered hands. All the elasticity and lightness seemed to have left her—it was a very humble little figure that knelt there—he longed to stretch out his hand and lay it gently on the bright hair, whispering words of gratitude for the prayer which he felt sure she offered on his behalf; but a fine and true instinct made him hesitate, for he thought he knew her well enough to understand that she, who strove to be so very ordinary and matter-of-fact by day, would be covered in confusion at being caught exhibiting this display of feeling for one who could never be anything more to her than a case. Perhaps too, the latent feeling of reverence that even the worst of men have for a woman's prayer kept him from breaking in upon that pure and holy communion with God.

So he feigned sleep, till she softly rose from her knees; then, as he remembered the despair of her attitude, and the nearness of their parting, his eyes grew bright, his cheeks flushed, and tender thoughts rose from his inmost heart and hovered on his tongue, but, even as he stretched out his hand to detain her at the bedside, he touched a little, grey envelope hidden in the folds of the coverlet—and was silent.

* * * * * *

The days lengthened, and the air was full of sweet scents and sounds. Still rather pale and languid, he sat at his bureau one morning trying to infuse a lover-like tenderness in his answer to one of those affectionate, half-dreaded epistles, he received nearly every day. Distracting visions of grey eyes, white bows, and straying golden hair, danced before him when he bent over the blank, staring page, absently biting the top of his pen; and, below the mechanical thoughts he was about to express, lay a deep feeling of shame and pity that it should be so difficult to write to her in the old strain. He knew, or thought he knew, his heart at last, but, though there was still time to remedy his mistake, even at the cost of a noble, passionate love, he shrank from the avowal that should destroy the idol she had raised on a pedestal of vows and kisses, and pictured vividly the cold looks of his family when they heard of an action, that his mother, who looked forward to his alliance with the beautiful and wealthy heiress he had chosen, would never forgive.

He had discussed it all with that second self to whom all actions, good or bad, are laid bare, and decided that this chapter of his life should be ended with the ending of his illness; and yet, his eyes would rove towards the garden seat on which the pretty nurse sat sewing with a background of bright blossoms, and a soft grassy carpet under her feet. There was no doubt that she had been fretting lately; she looked pale, and there was a hard line in her forehead as she bent over her work. He threw down his pen impatiently as he

watched her, pleased yet sorry that the coming separation made her seem so sad. A sob rose in his throat as he thought of the morrow —there was no longer any excuse for her to stay, and yet no—no, he could not bear to let her go!

And as he leant wearily back in his chair, the pretty nurse, believing herself alone and unseen, did a very strange thing for such a wise and practical little person, she threw down her work, regardless of needle and thread, and burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

His first impulse was to rush out, and clasp her in his arms, pouring into her ears the story of his overwhelming love, but he dared not approach her, fettered as he was; so, cursing his vacillating heart that had failed to decide before, what was dearest and best to him on earth, he resolved to end his own indecision, and the pretty nurse's trouble. "When you read this confession," he wrote to his betrothed, with a shaking hand, "I beg you to remember that it pains me to write, as much as it will you to read. When I asked you to be my wife, before Heaven, I loved you better than any woman in the world, and I never meant to change, but now there is some one else. I could not accept your pure heart feeling this, and I knew you would rather have the truth. The knowledge has come to me so slowly, that I could not hint at it before; perhaps I shrank from doing so; you must believe the best of me. I will not dare to excuse myself. For breaking our engagement, I ask you to forgive me, without venturing to hope for your forgiveness, and I ask you to forget me, knowing that you are worthy of a better love than mine."

With his mind in a tumult of doubt and misgiving, he dropped this incoherent and ungrateful epistle into the gaping, scarlet slit in the wall, a little way up the road, and saw it gathered carelessly among a heap of missives, merry and sad, and thrust into a long brown bag that the punctual postman promptly shouldered, locking the box with a clanking key, and, he thought, making a great deal of unnecessary noise. As he walked into the garden, his heart beat high with hope and longing.

The pretty nurse had resumed her sewing, and as he took the vacant place beside her, he saw that the curled lashes were still wet. They sat together for a space in silence too eloquent for words. At last he said, with a delicious feeling of power:

"Will you give me a promise?"

She answered lightly, and without raising her eyes.

"Not unless it is easy to keep."

"*You* shall decide that," he went on, breathlessly. "You brought me back to life again; but I can't value it, unless you will share it with me, my darling! And catching her unwilling hand, he covered it with kisses.

"Please stop," said the pretty nurse, with flushed cheeks, as she disengaged her fingers from his warm clasp, "there is altogether some mistake. I have been engaged to be married for some time; and, I

heard that *you* were also; your behaviour is therefore quite unaccountable."

Her words struck chill on his heart, and, though he hastened to assure her of his freedom, her manner, even more than her declaration, showed him that she did not love him. Her indifference had been real then, and not assumed, increasing with his convalescence.

He sat there, quite stunned by the discovery.

The pretty nurse stole one or two sympathetic glances at him, and then, thinking he would rather bear his disappointment alone, gathered up her work and left him. She smiled to herself, wise little woman that she was, at the infatuation which seemed so very sincere and incurable—*at present*. It was a long time before he knew that he was alone. The struggle in his breast was bitter; but he conquered in the end, and was astonished to find that his pride had suffered more than his love, the feeling of pique being paramount in his heart. As he recovered slowly, but surely, reviewing the past and the present, the remembrance of the letter to his betrothed—even now on its way—came on him like a thunderbolt. He sprang up, feeling that it must be intercepted at all hazards, and the fire of his determination left him no time for brooding.

As he hurried towards the house, intent on starting for a certain hall in a western county, a gentle hand was laid on his arm.

"Can you spare me a minute?" said the pretty nurse's sweet and joyous voice. "I feel so happy that I *must* tell some one—at last I have got the news for which I have wept and prayed."

"Wept and prayed!" he echoed, as if in a dream.

"Yes; he" (how tenderly she sounded the little word) "writes that he has got the appointment for which we have waited so long, and we are starting for India next month. Congratulate me!"

He took her two hands in his, and looked into her beautiful eyes without answering.

They stood together, under a flowery arch, about which there was an incessant hum of bees. In after years he never heard that buzzing murmur without thinking of the pretty nurse's last words.

"I will forgive you," she said, very softly, "for asking me to be your wife when you have pledged your word elsewhere. Perhaps the time will come when you will thank me for my unkind answer, when you are ashamed of the short-lived dream for which you were prepared to sacrifice your duty, the hopes of your family, and the love of a noble and constant woman. Go to her at once, and make amends for your wayward heart, the more because she does not know its weakness. And now, good-bye."

In another hour he was in an express train, whirling away from the seductive dream to the sweet reality. The pretty nurse's voice still rang in his ears. How right she was after all! He recalled his mother's tender anxiety as he came away, hardly calmed by the clumsy excuse he had given for his haste, and was glad he had not

disappointed her. He thought of an autumn day last year on which he had taken a solemn vow and sealed it with a kiss, and almost felt the slight, yielding figure in his arms, and the happy tears on his cheek, and his face grew hot as he remembered the real nature of his errand, and pictured the honest, unquestioning acceptance of the excuse with which he intended to account for this impromptu visit. He knew the letter would not be delivered till the morning, and trusted to fate to obtain and destroy it before it reached her hands.

He despised himself for the first time in his life, as remorseful, unwelcome thoughts came crowding in upon his already confused and excited mind, till, worn out bodily and mentally, from sheer weariness he fell into a broken sleep in which he saw the strange vision of a well-known, beautiful face that looked sadly down at him from a clouded sky, whispering, "Wayward heart, good-bye!"

And as he neared the end of his journey, the old, sweet yearning to see the face of his betrothed came over him. It spurred him up the dark, lonely road, through the tall gates, to the very doors of the hospitable old mansion that opened wide to receive him.

There was a loud hubbub of welcome, a swift footstep, a little, joyous cry, and then a deep silence in the lamp-lit hall as he took her, trembling and speechless, into his arms.

She had no words of welcome for him, but her eyes spoke, and he understood.

Before the loving clasp was loosened, his heart had passed out of danger and into safe keeping, and the past was no more.

As they sat together, later in the evening, in a favourite nook, she said innocently:

"And now, my dearest, tell me what awful presentiment made you rush down here to see me when you were scarcely fit to be out of your room?"

The letter weighed heavily on his conscience as he replied:

"I feared to lose you; don't ask me any more. I am glad of the omen, since it meant nothing, and brought me to you a little sooner."

He tenderly returned the soft pressure of her hand, trembling as he recalled the cruel, written words and their ruthless power. For a moment he was tempted to tell her the truth, and place himself at her mercy; but he had not the heart to wound her implicit trust, and dreaded the confession.

He tossed and turned throughout the night, sick with anxiety, dreading yet longing for the morning, hoping, doubting, and planning with wakeful weariness till just before the dawn of the day that was to decide his destiny.

He awoke from his restless slumber with a start; it was nearly eight o'clock!

Haggard and unrefreshed, he hurried on his clothes, and quickly traversing the garden, reached the great gates, just as the postman came in sight. The coast was clear, and his heart beat madly at the

thought of being released from this horrible, pursuing vengeance, when a silvery laugh sounded near him.

She stood there in her pretty, belted gown, with her hands full of dewy, fresh-gathered flowers.

"Whither so early, pray?" she asked, noting with anxiety his pallor, and the dark circles round his eyes. "You should not come out when the mornings are so chilly. Ah, here comes the postman! What has he brought me, I wonder?"

They stretched out their hands together. She merrily curious; he with set teeth and pale as death. As luck would have it, she dropped her flowers just as the postman held out the bundle of missives addressed to the hall, and as she stooped almost involuntarily he forgot his gallantry for once, and, seizing the packet, hastily drew out the easily recognised, fatal letter, crushing it in his hand with a muttered "Thank God!"

When he helped her to pick up the scattered blooms, she noticed the trembling of his hand, and said pityingly:

"How weak you are still! Your nurse should not have let you come away," she added softly, as they walked slowly towards the house.

"She advised me to come, and she knew what was right," he answered, looking fondly into the sweet, serious face beside him.

"I owe her a debt I can never repay," whispered his betrothed, innocently wise, "for giving you back to me."

She offered him a posy of the fragrant white blossoms she had been gathering. And he kissed the flowers that had saved him.

PENMON CROSS.

On Anglesey there stands a lonely cross,
Lifting from fresh green fields its ancient head;
With dim, mysterious characters o'erspread,
By Time's wild rain effaced and creeping moss.
Perchance the holy Seiriol each boss
And curve saw chiselled; near it paused the tread
Of wayfarer, till his rude prayers were said;
Here war's fierce remnant counted gain or loss.
Celt, Saxon, Norman now have given it o'er
To slow decay. About it graze the sheep;
Fearless the hares from frequent warren creep;
All undisturbed the antlered deer feed on:
And God His gentle creatures' worship more
May prize than blood-stained human orison.

Marion Meteyard.

MEMPHIS AND SAKKARAH.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S. Author of "Letters from Majorca," "In the Lotus Land," etc., etc.

Elephant over the Door of a House in Cairo, as a Protection against the Evil Eye.

THE impossible happens, and for once, and one day only, once for all, we found ourselves, like James Beauchamp, amongst the "personally conducted."

It was one of our regrets that we had not time to go up the Nile. Not only the Second, but the First Cataract was out of the question. Yet we had our consolation even in this. We found there was only one way of doing the river: chartering your own dahabeeyeh, for your own small party. Egypt was crowded: Cairo was overflowing: people were coming in at the risk of choosing between the streets and the very worst of accommodation. Though it was already late in the season, the usual Nile boats bound for the cataract were thronged. No new arrival had any chance of joining, unless a berth, long taken, happened to fall in. Messrs. Cook and Son have the exclusive management of these excursions, and so far may be said to possess Egypt, of which they are the modern Pharaohs. It could not be in better hands and everything is admirably arranged. But to take passage in one of these vessels; to live for two months, more or less, in close contact with a multitude who may prove charming, or may jar every nerve in your body—this was out of the question. Even with time at our command, we should have given up all idea of the Nile for that year.

Nevertheless we felt that we should like one single day upon the sacred river. As yet we had not even dipped our hands in the water

which may almost be called miraculous. It was clearly a duty to gaze upon the spot where once stood ancient Memphis, and pass on to the Step Pyramid of Sakkarah, the Serapeum and Mariette's house. This could only be easily done by joining one of Messrs. Cook and Son's excursions: and we accepted the condition. Whatever the experience, it would be a matter of hours, not weeks or months.

The eventful day arrived, lovely, warm, a brilliant sky and wonderful atmosphere. Everything was undertaken by the organisers, excepting luncheon, and this was provided by our hotel, packed in a small hamper.

Our dahabeeyeh was moored to the banks of the Nile, not far from the iron bridge. The river, glittering in the sunshine, had never looked more bright and blue, and one longed to add solitude to its charms. But those days have long passed; the solitary places of the earth are now the inaccessible. To-day, the boat was crowded, and as usual by far the larger number of people were American.

On this occasion we were alone, with Aleck in attendance: Aleck restored to power and happy at being able to command. With Osman, who had his own personal attendants when any were required, he was seldom wanted; he resented Osman accordingly, without daring to show it. Osman had arranged to accompany us, and we had felt it an offering to friendship. "The spirit of the scene will evaporate under such conditions," he laughed. "But it will be a new experience and we must support each other. Perhaps we may even be amused."

But once more fate stepped in, though Osman's absence was not exactly for diplomatic reasons. The Khedive was not well; he had upon him one of those strange fits of depression which occasionally though rarely attacked him; warnings, possibly, of the early death that was to overtake him. He had desired Osman, to whom he was strongly attached, to remain with him for the greater part of that day: and Osman could only bow to the royal command.

"We are not to visit Sakkarah together," he said to us in a note despatched early in the morning by a trusty messenger; "and I shall have to see the excursion with your eyes. You will dine with me to-night and tell me all your impressions: and you shall make our Egyptian coffee, in which art you are now more skilled than I."

So it fell out that we were alone. Our dragoman rejoiced, and if acquainted with English proverbs, no doubt thought it an ill wind that blew no one any good. He marshalled us on board, making way, like the "clearers" of ancient days, and we had to follow. "Crowded boat, sir," he turned to say; "you will not like it." For by this time he knew something of our ways and habits, likes and dislikes. To people as intelligent as our dragoman, who in their way see much of life, and for their own purposes are always unconsciously studying human nature, this knowledge comes quickly. It becomes

FISHING-BOAT ON THE NILE.

a sort of instinct with them, and they soon learn to "adapt themselves to their company."

Aleck had some way of generally doing the best thing even in the face of difficulties, and to-day was no exception to the rule. He found us two seats in the stern of the vessel, where a crowd could not come, and we were in comparative solitude. On the upper deck people could scarcely move, but their voices by no means suffered a similar restraint.

The dahabeeyeh started on her way: a very bright and brilliant way. Cairo, its Mosques, minarets and splendid citadel, began to fade in the distance. Old Cairo, with its quaint streets and houses, mushrabeeyeh windows, and graceful women bearing their water pitchers; Roda Island, with its Nilometer, and half-wild but lovely gardens—all melted away as a dream. The banks of the river were picturesque with occasional strings of camels, with signs and sounds of Oriental life, and overshadowing trees; splendid sycamores spreading in the plains and graceful palms that found their reflections in the water.

We were nearer the "sacred stream" than those on the upper deck, and its quiet ripplings came up to us with grateful sound. Nothing could be more picturesque than the Nile boats passing on their upward way; whilst the windings of the river made the scene ever changing. Ever and anon the water, disturbed by our passage, surged amongst the reeds and rushes of the riverside with a delicious swishing murmur that carried us back to days far gone: days of early youth, when in distant French villages we had first learned the beauty of these sounds, punting amongst the marshes and small streams; watching the quaint villagers cutting and stacking their peat; and gathering scores of rushes too often for no other purpose than the amusement of the hour. But childhood is prodigal: Time lasts for ever, and the world's resources are inexhaustible. To-day came back the lovely sound, with an Egyptian flavour about it: but it was not equal to those bygone happy Decembers and warm Julys.

Yet to-day we had more; for we had only to stretch out our hands and pluck the exquisite lotus flowers of this enchanted land. True they did not abound like the reeds and rushes, but they were the more prized for their rareness. In spite of opposing influences, to some extent conquered, it was a delicious experience, an exquisite morning. We realised how great must be the charm of sailing up to the Second Cataract in one's own boat, taking one's own time, visiting leisurely all the ruins and remains that lie on its banks: above all accompanied by one's own friends. It may well be called the most restful and health-restoring of all journeys. There is a peculiarly soothing element in a river journey altogether absent from the sea.

To our left lay the long straight road leading to the Pyramids we had so lately visited. From the other end we had watched the long

STATUES OF SEKHET.

cavalcade of personally-conducted tourists; had sympathised with James Beauchamp in his strange experience, and found our sympathy to some extent wasted. Though only beginning life, he was one of those happy men who make the best of all things, and always see the brighter side of the shield. It may be done, though sometimes with an effort: and it makes all the difference to life's pilgrimage. We little thought at that moment that we should be in the same position ourselves before long, though only for a few hours. Yet there was a difference; and the most unpleasant part of these "personally-conducted" excursions would be absent to-day.

We made way under the brilliant skies. The reeds and rushes accompanied us, and the water brought out all their music. On either hand stretched the wide plains, with their occasional groves and villages.

After a time we reached Bedrasheyn, where we had to leave the boat; and were almost sorry to change our quarters. The passage up the river, so singularly pleasant and dreamlike, had taken us in imagination to the days of Ancient Egypt: to Antony and Cleopatra and their gorgeous pageants; the living sacrifices that were wont to be offered to the Nile in the past; the wonderful record of towns and nations appearing and disappearing as the ages rolled on; to the long-sought source of the river, and the interest it has borne for all students of ancient history.

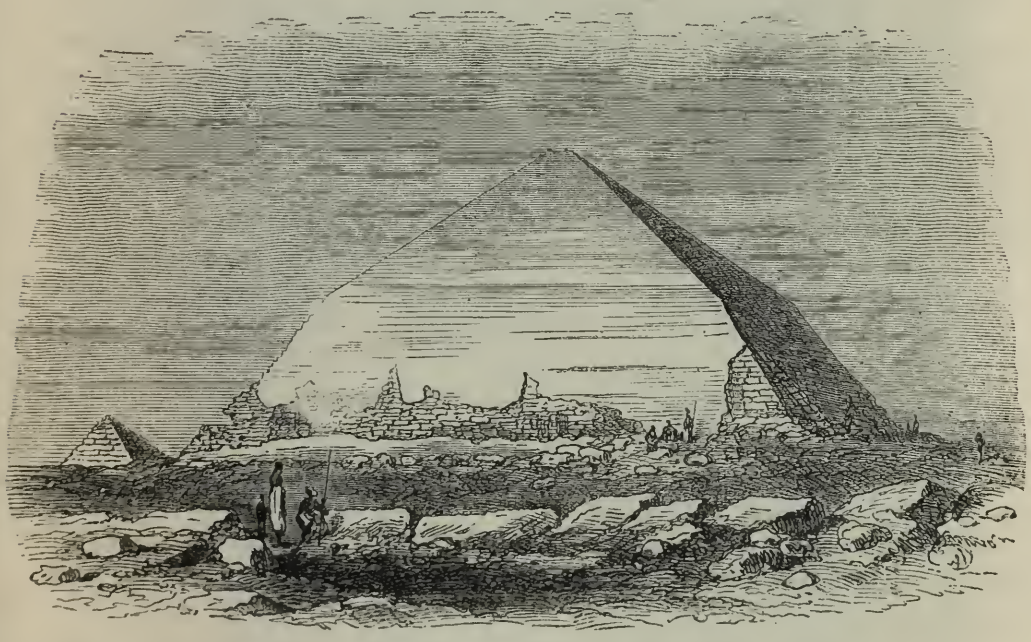
On the banks stood a large party of donkeys, every donkey accompanied by its boy: the boys all excited and talkative, each fearing his own donkey would prove just the one too many. Aleck was the first to land and secure what he considered the best of the animals. "There is as much difference in donkeys, sir, as in people," he remarked, with his tendency to philosophise, as he adjusted the stirrups. "You can do anything with some, nothing with others. These are good beasts, and I shall be at hand to see that the boys behave themselves."

Bedrasheyn was a large Fellah village, composed, as usual, of mud huts: less poverty-stricken than many of their kind, but this is not saying very much: excursionists land here in large flocks on their way to Sakkarah and leave small doles behind them. It was conspicuous for its magnificent palm-groves which make it an oasis in a desert, wonderfully refreshing to the eye. The trees threw their long shadows upon the ground, and after some distance of winding embankment we passed into their cool obscurity, the lights and shades which chequered the dyke roads.

The ground on which we gazed was really sacred in point of antiquity. On this very spot once stood ancient Memphis, capital of Lower Egypt, its largest and most flourishing city; without a rival until Alexandria arose; and, later on, Fostat and Cairo; and extinguished its glory. The very stones of Memphis went to the building of the latter.

It was a city of wonders: of palaces and temples, of academies celebrated for their learning; of kings who swayed Egypt despotically, almost governed the world; of powerful merchants, and inexhaustible wealth and luxury. The most costly material was not too good for their palaces; the richest marbles, the most refined sculpture of which they were capable, went to the adorning of their streets. So magnificent and substantial were many of their finest buildings, that but for man's destruction they might have been standing to-day: rivalling the Pyramids in defiance of time. But this was not to be, and to-day there remains no faintest trace even of ruins.

Herodotus has handed down his record of the city. Menes was supposed to have been its founder. It was therefore still older than



Pyramid of Dashoor.

the Pyramids, and was built in days when the most gigantic, almost impossible enterprises had no terrors for that wonderful people.

Memphis was the old home of the Pharaohs, and here they lived when many of the events recorded in Scripture took place. We have already remarked that for this reason Egypt must ever be the most interesting country in the world, but there are other reasons why it should be so. If Omar's general, Amroo, had not founded Fostat, Memphis might have continued to flourish; and Cairo, with its citadel-crowned rock, its mosques, its lovely chains of hills, need never have existed. But though Memphis of old might have possessed larger and more splendid monuments, temples, palaces, nothing could have rivalled the beauty of some of the mosques of Cairo and the Tombs of the Caliphs.

The situation of Memphis, too, was not so striking. Lying in the vast plain, near the flowing waters of the Nile, it owned a less elevated though still beautiful citadel, whilst no chain of hills rose in the immediate background. Menes had diverted the course of the Nile, once running under the shadow of the Libyan hills, into a more westerly channel: or if it possessed two branches, which seems probable, had turned the water of the eastern branch into the western. This gave him the necessary tract of land for building the city. He constructed dykes against the overflowing of the river; but though these existed in the time of Herodotus, and were kept up by the Persians, no trace of them remains.

Beyond Bedrasheyn lies Mitrahenny with its singular mounds; distinct remains of Ancient Memphis, or at least marking its site.

These mounds are supposed to have been enclosures about the temple and palaces. The city covered an immense area: but much space was given up to villas standing in large gardens, and to the groves solemnly dedicated to religious rites. Some of these sacred groves—especially that of Proteus—were richly ornamented. The Citadel looked down upon all; a white wall surrounded it; and only when the wall fell did Cambyses consider Egypt conquered.

Memphis was great in commercial prosperity; a prosperity probably only exceeded by Alexandria. To its harbour came the produce not only of the Nile but of other countries. The Phœnicians, who had come over from Tyre, here had their special quarters, and were great, wealthy and liberal. But within the groves of Astarte, pleasure and licentiousness abounded: the Phœnicians had none of the dignity and solidity of the Egyptians.

The inhabitants of Memphis were famous for their factories, embroideries, every species of handicraft. Science was equally cultivated, and the schools attached to the temples were learned and prosperous.

Four centuries after Herodotus had passed away Memphis was still flourishing, though its glory was on the wane. From being the largest and most brilliant city in the world, Diodorus writes of it at that time as having yielded to Alexandria. After that it rapidly diminished. In the time of Strabo, not long before the Christian era, it still existed, but in partial ruin. Its temples were the last to disappear, when Theodosius endeavoured to put down idolatry.

Then came the Arab invasion, and the wealth and greatness of Memphis winged their flight to Fostat. If the founding of Alexandria and the reign of the Ptolemys gave the first blow to its downfall, Fostat and Cairo gave the last. But long after Alexandria flourished, Memphis was still looked upon as the religious capital of Egypt, its kings were crowned there, its temples were held specially sacred. A modern parallel exists in the kings of Norway and Sweden, who have their capital in Stockholm and Christiania, but are always crowned at Tronjheim.

STEP PYRAMID OF SAKKARAH.

Memphis had at least four temples famous for their size and magnificence: the temple of Ptah, the tutelary divinity of the city, and the temples of Athor, Apis, and Serapis. The last was the Serapeum in the Necropolis, which we shall presently come to. Menes is said to have built the temple of Ptah, and succeeding kings added to it, until it became colossal. Rameses caused various statues to be erected in front of it, his own statue of enormous dimensions being still visible at Bedrasheyn.

Theodosius in his attempts to put down idolatry in the fourth century, unfortunately directed his zeal against the temples of Memphis. But for this they might have remained to the end of time, imperishable monuments to the greatness of a departed people and their profound religious convictions. Had the temples remained, Memphis might never have utterly disappeared, but their downfall completed her ruin.

Vestiges of the city were still visible in the twelfth century, for a writer of those times records that a marvellous extent of ruins yet existed. In spite of the antiquity of Memphis, of all the various governments she had been subjected to, often oppressed as slaves or bondsmen; in spite of centuries of effort to efface her from the earth, even to the carrying away of her stones for building new cities; in spite of a lapse of four hundred years after these devastations, her ruins in the twelfth century were still marvellous enough to confound all who gazed upon them, for they were beautiful and astonishing beyond description.

During the indolent reign of the Mamelooks, the dykes were neglected, the river overflowed annually and covered the plains with mud, as it does still, and for three hundred years the very site of Memphis became nothing but an uncertain tradition: "a name writ in water." In the present century a search for the ruins brought their traces to light, and these, though trifling, are profoundly interesting.

Inestimable treasures had once existed in these ruins, which tempted the cupidity of the population in the twelfth century—when the Wars of the Crusades were going on elsewhere—until the thirst for gold became a disease, not only then but in succeeding centuries also. Golden statues disappeared; treasures of gold and precious stones were unearthed and carried away; splendidly carved images were broken up or bored in the hope of finding concealed hoards: until at length nothing remained. Only long after the Nile had year by year overflowed its banks, and the ruins of Memphis had become a mere name, did all searching cease.

But though Fostat completed the downfall of Memphis it never attained to a tithe of its grandeur, which was more nearly approached by Modern Cairo. Yet between Cairo and Memphis there will always exist this great difference: the interest of the one is comparatively modern, the other goes back to the most remote ages. Thus the glory surrounding Memphis can never touch Cairo. The one

witnessed all the tragic events of sacred and profane history from the earliest known records: the other, is, so to say, of to-day. Before Memphis existed, we know not what was going on in the world: whether man had already been created, or whether the earth had only then reached the period when life was first given to her.

Yet the time came when Memphis with all its greatness and grandeur, was to become as a dream or fable.

And as fables are the records of all those wonderful cities of the past; we seem as infants in comparison with those early nations. The study of all they attempted, all they accomplished, is an education to any one destined to take active part in the world. It will broaden his views, enlarge his mind, deepen his capacities, and enable him, more than anything else, to realise that to determination of purpose and earnestness of character scarcely anything is impossible.

Memphis was the name given to the city by the Greeks: Men-nefer, the name given to it by Menes, signifying *Fair Haven*, or *Haven of Good.* It had other names also, such as the "City of the White Wall," alluding to the castle which was known to exist. It was also called *Ha Ptah*, the "House of Ptah," in allusion to its temple: the largest, perhaps, the world has ever seen. The temples of other gods were included within its boundaries, and the whole was surrounded by a wall overshadowed by sacred palm groves.

Ptah, as we know, was the tutelary god of the Egyptians. His temple at Memphis begun in the early days of Menes, was added to, adorned, enriched, down to the times of the Roman Emperors. Ptah was the creator of life and light; of the egg which, breaking, sent forth the sun and the moon. Ptah-Sokar-Osiris—a trinity of names from which the word Sakkarah is derived—was Lord of the Necropolis of Memphis, gave to the setting sun the power to rise again, to departing souls eternal life. Apis, the bull, was sacred to Ptah. According to some writers, a portion of the temple, called the Apieum, was curtained off and set apart for his use. Others state that the Apieum, though close to the temple, was a separate building. Here he reposed on cushions and was delicately fed. The power to see into the future, even to influence it, was given to him: and when answers were needed to questions, they were decided by taking food to him. If he ate the food, the answer was favourable; if he refused, the contrary. In this manner he foretold deaths and pronounced judgments.

Here, too, was kept a sacred serpent; on the lake within the temple boats were ever floating about dedicated to this wise deity, whilst a sacred grove overshadowed the waters.

And of all this what remains to this day?

A few mutilated statues; a few stones scattered about the sandy ground; a few rubbish heaps. Nothing that can positively tell you the exact position of a single street or house or temple belonging to that vast city which might well be ranked amongst the wonders of the world. All has disappeared; but its Necropolis remains. The City

of the Dead has been spared, and in a state of remarkable preservation. But this is no exception to the rule in Egypt: whilst cities with all their magnificence were overthrown, cemeteries were left untouched: as though conquerors sympathised with the description of the Egyptians given by the Greeks: "They looked upon their house as unstable and vanishing, but their tomb as eternal; their life as a phantom, death as the commencement of eternal life."

It was to this site of Ancient Memphis that we steered our way on leaving the dahabeeyeh. As we moored alongside nothing could look more picturesque than this Nile-boat reposing on the stream: nothing more quaint and curious than the motley crowd of donkeys, men, women and donkey-boys, all curious and excited, with a background of mud-huts, palm-trees, and small minarets.

Landing for most had been a scramble, the guide having intimated that in the matter of donkeys it would be a matter of first comers having first choice. Every one therefore wanted to be in front, and some confusion ensued. We quietly took possession of our donkeys when the rush was over, and in the meantime amused ourselves in watching the struggles of others to mount: the saddle that *would* turn with a lady of capacious dimensions never intended for anything less than a full-grown horse; the huge disproportion between a son of Anak and his meek over-laden quadruped; the terrors of some of the females of the party when their donkeys went off at a gallop, and of others, unprepared for so much energy, who were suddenly brought to earth.

But at last the whole cavalcade was off; a struggling, irregular procession, in which the ludicrous element was more conspicuous than any other.

How, in such an atmosphere, could one get up the right spirit and feeling for the site of Ancient Memphis, for the Necropolis, the Step Pyramid, the Apis tombs? It was impossible.

We left behind us an interesting Jewish cemetery, in keeping with all the feeling of desolation and decay inspired by this ancient site. We passed between mud-huts, some of which were evidently empty and deserted, their occupants probably away earning the daily bread, whilst from others came women surrounded by children, whose small feet and voices tried to keep pace with our donkeys, crying "backsheesh—sheesh—sheesh," with small outstretched hands. But many of the riders had their own hands far too full, their attention far too occupied in steering their donkeys and keeping their seats, to listen to the little cries for charity.

We galloped under the palm-trees, and presently came to the fallen statue of Rameses II., a huge figure of polished granite, nearly fifty feet long, lying on its face, in a sunken enclosure. It is further protected by a wall, and you look down upon it from a platform. When discovered it was offered to the British Museum: but as one of the few relics of antiquity adorning the site of Memphis it is in better

CURIOSITIES (NOT EGYPTIAN) PERSONALLY-CONDUCTED.

keeping where it reposes. This is no doubt one of the statues which Rameses—the Sesostris of the Greeks, and one of the Pharaohs who oppressed the Children of Israel—caused to be erected to himself, in front of the Temple of Ptah. There were many of these colossal statues according to Herodotus, but this is the only one as yet discovered.

Every one dismounted to gaze upon the wonderful image. An old American gentleman accompanied by his daughter immediately took out a voluminous diary and entered notes according to the lady's directions.

"Are you there?" said the daughter, for all the world as if she had been speaking into a telephone. The question was not addressed to the statue but to the old gentleman.

"Proceed, my dear," he returned in homely phrase. "I am all attention."

The lady closed her eyes for a moment, evidently invoking inspiration; then opened them, stared with wide eyes at the image as one in a trance, and began: "Gazed upon the image of the Great Rameses for the first time under the azure skies of Egypt. Dismounted for the purpose from our amiable but upsetting donkeys; on getting down we both felt very much shaken up and unsteady on our legs——"

"My dear," protested the old gentleman, "you are wandering from the subject. May I remind you that my diary is only an octavo manuscript of some four hundred pages."

"Don't interrupt my flow of ideas," returned the daughter. "I must do things my own way, or not at all. Where was I? On dismounting——"

"Already entered," cried the father, with excusable irritability. "If you waste any more time, there will be nothing left to do but to mount again. Describe the statue."

"Reclining in the cradle of antiquity—"

"I don't see any cradle," interrupted the owner of the note-book. "I want facts, not imagination."

"You are nothing *but* fact; matter-of-fact; prosy fact, and dull as ditch-water," returned the daughter wrathfully. "If you interrupt me again I won't say another word. Are you there?"

"Looks very much like me," murmured the old gentleman sarcastically, breaking the point of his pencil in his anger, and bringing out another. "Proceed."

——"lies the body of Rameses the Second," went on the lady from the point at which she had been interrupted. "Said to be Rameses II., last oppressor of the Children of Israel, who caused the ten plagues of Egypt, and was subsequently drowned in the Red Sea."

"Just as if he could have been drowned *before* the plagues," murmured the old gentleman; "besides, I've an idea it wasn't *that* Pharaoh who was drowned at all." Luckily the daughter did not hear the remark.

"Has a very calm, placid and amiable expression—which some people of the nineteenth century would do well to imitate," she pointedly added. Considering that the statue was lying upon its face, the lady was bringing more imagination to bear upon her subject. "This amiable expression convinces me that this is not Rameses II., tyrant and oppressor, and that all antiquarians until now have been wrong on this point. It remains for me to put them right. This is more probably the statue of Menes, the first mortal monarch of the earth, who succeeded to the dynasty of the gods. We have no record of that dynasty, but my inner consciousness tells me that it existed. This statue is colossal; great breadth across the shoulders; well developed chest. Beautiful granite, with a high polish. Menes himself was a highly polished gentleman. We feel that the statue should not be left here lying in mud, but should be removed to the hall of the British Museum, where its grandeur would impose upon all visitors."

How much longer the lady's inspiration and fancy might have lasted cannot be known, for at that moment the guide gave the signal for departure. Some four or five young men who had profited by the halt to eat oranges, now amused themselves by a parting fling of orange-peel at the head of the image, each trying to be nearest the mark; each thereby showing his reverence for the remains of antiquity. "Shameless and scandalous," murmured the lady, as she moved off to rejoin her amiable donkey. "I wonder the mild expression of that benign countenance does not change into the frowns of Jove, and hurl anathemas and thunderbolts at those desecrating vandals." We thought it strong language, yet could not altogether disagree with her. But in a personally-conducted assemblage there must always be a large number of such spirits who must be accepted for what they are worth.

On went the cavalcade, leaving the statue of Rameses to its violated repose. Soon we reached the village of Mitrahenny, which was very similar to that of Bedrasheyn, though the palm groves were finer and more abundant. These mud-huts invariably look sad and poverty-stricken, and only in such a climate could they be habitations for human beings: but they have the advantage of fresh air uncontaminated by a crowded population; air laden with the influences of the sea, or the endless wastes of the desert.

Here too we were still on the site of Memphis, which stretched from the banks of the Nile to Sakkarah and the Necropolis.

A wide plain of rich fields, already beginning to turn green; for here the Nile overflows and deposits its fertilizing soil. In the distance were groups of pyramids. Far away, gigantic amongst them all, stood the Pyramid of Cheops: and nearer, conspicuous in its own group, the Step Pyramid of Sakkarah, chief object of our excursion. Beyond it rose the Pyramids of Dashoor.

These different groups of Pyramids form the Necropolis of Memphis:

marvellous and wonderful tombs, of which the eye can still take in more than eighty at a glance. How many have gone to ruin, is unknown. Including the distant Pyramid of Meydoom, built by Seneferoo of the 3rd dynasty—the first king whose name is recorded on contemporaneous monuments—this vast Necropolis stretches over a tract of country forty-five miles long. Added to these kingly pyramids were countless tombs carved out of the limestone rock: mausoleums even more time-defying than the Pyramids themselves.

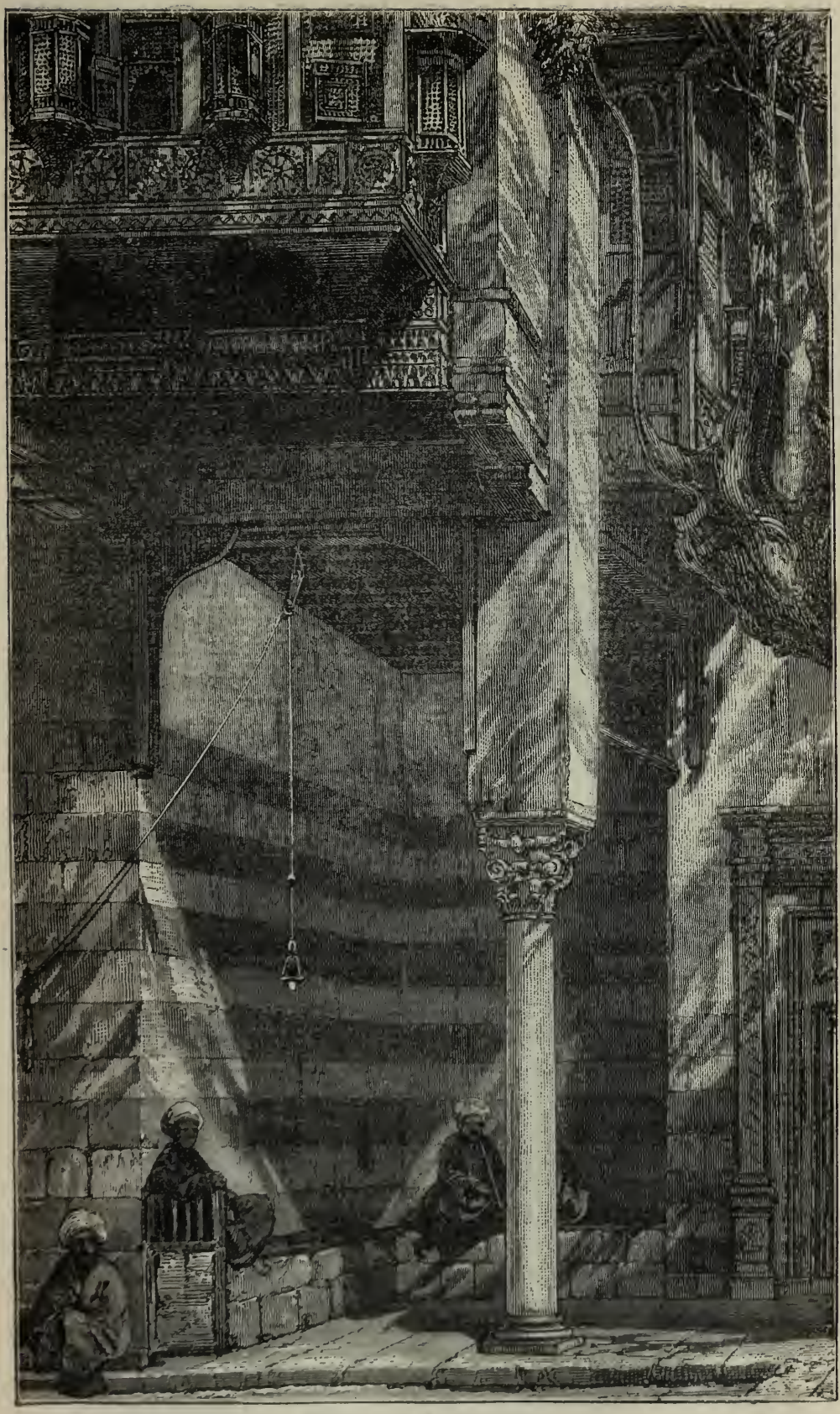
These Pyramids cannot fail at all times to excite our sense of the sublime. Their destiny, enormous size, antiquity, and imperishable nature, make one feel how great were the giants of those days. Yet, gazing at them with astonishment and delight, there comes also a sense of pain: a keen realization of the broken dreams and visions of our little lives which so quickly "have their day and cease to be."

It all gives one some idea of the greatness of Ancient Memphis, its magnificence, power, and extent: as well as the length of the ages during which it reigned, greatest and most civilised city of the world. The whole epoch of the building of the Pyramids was marked by prosperity, and more or less by peace. It was a period of great learning and research, and many scientific and religious works were written. The priesthood were advanced, and did much to instruct the people in theology. Astronomy was already a well-directed study, and the calendar of the heavens was systematically drawn up. The Pharaohs were more than kings: they were representatives of the immortals: each monarch being supposed a direct incarnation of the Sun-god Ra. The name—Per-aa in Egyptian, Pharaoh in Hebrew—signifies "The Great Gate:" the gate through which every one passed to the land of light and immortality.

From Mitrahenny we went westward out of palm groves. A small picturesque villa, overshadowed by trees, stood in the plain, built by one to whom this ancient spot strongly appealed, who loved the melancholy atmosphere of the Necropolis. For a little in the distance rose the Pyramids, Sakkarah towering above them all.

The village was small and uninteresting, like all these villages of the plains, and we turned northwards towards the pyramids and more groves. Near them was a magnificent sycamore that must have stood for ages, and close to it a spring of water and the tomb of a sheykh.

We were on the very edge of the desert. Before us stretched the wide plains hot and glistening in the sunshine, here and there pyramids breaking the monotony of the flat surface. One gazed almost appalled at the immense measureless expanse, which seems to make the world so large. Here again, on the plateau of the Necropolis, we stood on ground sacred to antiquity. Besides the tombs, were buildings that have long since disappeared, whose ruins indeed exist, but are buried in the sand.



House of a Sheykh.

As we have seen, from the earliest ages immense pains, labour and time were bestowed in ornamenting the tomb-chambers. One reason for this profuse decoration must have been that the people of 4000 and 5000 years ago, upon whom this talent had dawned as a revelation from the gods, wished to hand down examples of their skill to future generations, and nothing could be better suited to their purpose than the walls of the everlasting tombs.

Here once stood the sacred lake across which the body of Apis was rowed to its burial in the Serapeum whenever a bull died at Memphis. Here stood green and fertile plains which have been compared to the flowery meads of Asphodel. Here stood the temple of Hecate, the gates of Cocytus and Truth, the headless statue of Justice.

Everything has disappeared excepting a few of the tombs.

The Serapeum was the outer temple, placed above the Apis Mausoleum. A long avenue of Sphinxes led up to it; and the head of one of these Sphinxes obtruding from the sand caused the discovery that delighted Mariette Pacha almost more than any other of his labours. Whilst living, the bull existed in the Apieum attached to the temple of Ptah at Memphis: but when dead he was brought across the sacred lake and conveyed with great pomp and ceremony through the avenue of Sphinxes to the Serapeum, and carried down to the mausoleum.

The people worshipped the remains, dead, in the Serapeum, just as, living, the bull had been worshipped in the Memphis Temple.

No expense was spared in the funeral rites of Apis; and in the reign of Ptolemy Soter, so extravagant had the priests become, that they had to borrow fifty talents from the king, a sum exceeding £11,000, advanced by the monarch without hesitation or rebuke.

Attached to the Serapeum was an institution of monks, as cloistered as any Roman Catholic order of the present day. These monks were connected with the worship of Serapis. On joining, they gave up the world and all they possessed; their only food henceforth being supplied to them by relatives. This was passed through a hole in the wall, for they never left their cells. The Temple of Isis also had its order of religious recluses. The ambition of these monks was to become insensible to all external impressions, to die completely to the world by a perpetual warfare with nature; the true death in life. From these early institutions no doubt arose the Christian orders of seclusion of a later date.

In the Egyptian Mausoleum were found some 3000 monuments or Apis tombs, hewn out of the solid rock; and above each tomb was a small chapel; a sloping passage connecting one with the other. But the bulls were interred in different ways, according to the custom of the period in which they existed.

The Egyptian Apis Mausoleum we visited was marvellous, stu-

pendous, inexpressibly solemn. A short passage led to the modern iron gate which guards the entrance, and admitted us into a long, gloomy passage, dimly lighted by candles and torches, with weird effect. We seemed to be walking amongst the ghosts and phantoms of the past.

Sixty-four vaults are now accessible: twenty-four containing the immense granite sarcophagi that held the Apis remains. The chambers were simply cut out of the solid rock, and may certainly last as long as the world itself. Mariette has described his overwhelming impressions on first entering these vaults and corridors. One of the chambers had been walled up in the reign of Rameses II., and until Mariette entered, had not been disturbed for nearly 4000 years. Yet everything remained as it had been left during the unbroken silence and repose of forty centuries.

The very finger-marks of the Egyptians who had put in the last stone were still apparent, the prints of naked feet upon the loose sand were distinctly visible, though a breath of air would have obliterated them. On the sarcophagus were the embalmed remains of the bull, undisturbed.

The Apis Mausoleum was divided into three parts, and it is the last section that is shown, grandest and most magnificent of all. Its galleries or corridors extend nearly 400 yards and the immense sarcophagi, that human power could scarcely move, are of granite.

It is doubtful whether this wonderful Apis Mausoleum does not give one even a more vivid idea of the gigantic energy and greatness of the early Egyptians, even than the Great Pyramids of Geezeh. The vastness of the corridors, the endless excavations of solid rock, the innumerable repetitions of enormous tombs, combined with the profound darkness and gloom, the eternal silence, fill the mind with an awe, almost a terror, defying all description. We appear to touch the very confines of the mysterious and the supernatural: there seems a hidden meaning within and beyond it all, which the mind in vain endeavours to fathom.

Near all this was Mariette's house, where he lived whilst his explorations were going on. We had dismounted, and our donkeys were left to graze upon such food as they might find, whilst we rested and explored. The verandah was soon a scene of laughter and chatter that seemed almost unholy within these realms of antiquity. Under the very shadow of the Step Pyramid, in all probability the oldest monument of the world, frivolity once more asserted itself, and the Bedouins who now occupy the house, looked on in their dark cloaks with a gravity that might have been a reproof.

The view was remarkable. On the one hand the green valley of the Nile, with its palm-trees, a strange contrast to the long pale stretches of desert beyond. Far off, rising into the blue sky like a dream-vision, the Mosque of Mohamet Ali with its slender minarets above the Citadel of Cairo. To the left the Great Pyramids, and,

nearer, those of Abusir. The rocky plateau of the desert between Abusir and Sakkarah, contained numberless Tomb Chambers: and still nearer to us were the grottoes of the sacred Ibis Mummies and of the Cats: none of which are now visited. There are still many open shafts scattered about, some of them fifty feet deep, leading to ancient tombs; pitfalls for the unwary.

Of the Step Pyramid we saw only the outside. It is different from all other pyramids. Its interior passages and chambers are more numerous and complicated; its four sides do not face the cardinal points of the compass; the base is not a perfect square; and one of its entrances faces southward. It was surrounded by a wall, and the enclosure was held sacred. It seems to have been built for some other purposes than that of the later pyramids of Egypt. Some writers have thought that it was the first pyramid consecrated to the use of the bull—an Apis Mausoleum: but there is not sufficient data for this theory, which would assign to it a later period than that of its probable construction.

Near it was the Pyramid of King Unas, opened in 1881, which we entered. It contains two large chambers and a smaller one communicating with each other by narrow passages. The granite sarcophagus of the king stood in the second chamber, and its alabaster walls were adorned with paintings still brilliant in colouring.

Brilliant also were the colours in the Tomb of Tih, though mutilated and defaced by visitors.

Tih was a priest who lived at Memphis under the 5th Dynasty—between 4000 and 5000 years ago. He was of humble origin, but attained to the highest rank and married Neferhotep, a member of the royal family of Tatkara. He became the king's intimate and familiar, Chief of the Gates of the Palace, Chief of the Royal Documents, Commander of the Profits. History records his great affection for his wife, who appears to have combined all spiritual graces with extreme beauty of form and feature. The walls of the tomb are covered with scenes from the domestic life of Tih, of the most interesting description. It is wonderful how the colours have retained their brilliancy for nearly fifty centuries, owing to the protection of the sand: and it is equally sad to see how in the period of ten years, they have become wilfully defaced and destroyed.

The drawings and paintings upon the walls are singular, spirited, and varied.

Tih is seen in every attitude and occupation; now hunting the wild boar and hippopotamus, now navigating his vessel on the Nile, now urging his field-labourers to greater exertion in reaping. Above one of the latter scenes is the inscription in hieroglyphics: "This is harvest time: man, when he works, is full of sweetness and content; such am I."

In every scene Tih stands upright, the commander's baton in hand. Here two magnificent statues of himself and his wife were found, now

ITINERANT DEALER, CAIRO.

in the Boulak museum. Man's occupation in those days was chiefly agricultural, full of peace and a certain calm gliding of the waters of life. For Tih, and for such as he, life was full of quiet pleasure, without dramatic incidents and violent emotions; crowned with plenty: surrounded by domestic happiness, a wife and children. He was looked upon with envy by those whose lot was less favoured. But all was the result of industry, mental power, and uprightness: he only reaped the fruits of his labours.

Few short excursions round Cairo are more interesting than this visit to Sakkarah, where you are surrounded by all that is most ancient in Egypt; where you feel that every footstep planted upon the sand covers a spot where traces of wonderful monuments and buildings still exist. Here once reposed the waters of the Sacred lake, here the Serapeum: there stood the Temple of Hecate, gloomy and vengeful goddess, and there the gigantic images of Truth and Justice, the latter not only blind but headless. The eye rests in amazement upon the clusters of tombs unchanged though thousands of years have rolled over them; upon the green plains over which the Nile spreads its fertilising waters; upon the vast sandy desert beyond. We are surrounded by the silence and solemnity of the ages: overwhelmed by the feeling that before these monuments nothing existed upon the earth due to the labour of man. We seem to stand face to face with primæval times, the early days of creation.

A short visit—above all, a visit disturbed by an unsympathetic crowd—is not sufficient. You would remain here and take up your abode in Mariette's house—it is possible to do so with permission—and gaze alone upon these wonders, not only by day but under the solemn solitude of night and darkness, the flashing stars, the pure and peaceful moon. Then the true atmosphere of these records of all the ages would come forth with all their magic, all their romance and power.

To-day this experience, which is surely there, was not for us. As far as possible, by detaching ourselves from the restless crowd, we endeavoured to become familiar with the spirit of the place; but our stay was numbered by moments, not by days. Too soon the word of command for reassembling and remounting was given; each claimed his own donkey, just as, at the Confusion of Tongues, every man called for his own sack.

We turned our backs upon the sublime and faced the ridiculous. Most of the cavalcade was in front, a very incongruous element upon the site of Ancient Memphis. Some were in danger of flying over the heads of their animals, others insensibly glided too near to the tails. Again the pantomime was played out. A scream from some fair equestrian would startle the air as her frisky quadruped landed her without ceremony upon the sand; or a spirited donkey, anxious to get to its journey's end, ran away with a maid, like Miss Bayley's perfidious captain. On this occasion there was no tragedy, but the

cries, joltings, and prayers for rescue would have made the fortune of a travelling circus.

As for ourselves, we lingered behind, unwilling to lose all the fun so liberally supplied. Over the undulating ground, scouring the plain, traversing the palm groves, riding along the embankments, away they went; until at last, the village of Bedrasheyn with its mud huts and small minarets, opened up, and our dahabeeyeh, calmly awaiting us on the Nile, announced the end of the performance.

The whole village seemed to have turned out to inspect us. The cavalcade dismounted, donkey-boys were given their backsheesh.

Immediately the air was rent with howlings, protestations, weeping and lamentation. None of them were satisfied. No matter what is given, their principle is to ask for more. Such agony and distress were never seen. The donkeys, their work over, stood still and silent; the play was evidently no novelty to them; whilst the personally-conducted, unmindful of the general hubbub, serenely embarked.

Not until we moved from the shore, did the donkey-boys give up their appeals; but once away in the stream, they threw up their arms and indulged in a wild war dance, evidently happy and jolly as the sand-boys they were.

Aleck secured the same seats on our return journey. Again the plash and murmur of the river threw out its soothing influence, whilst a cool breeze from the surface, rose like an exhalation singularly pleasant and reviving. Again the reeds and rushes by the riverside threw out their calm delicious music, and as we passed onward, a blue lotus flower raised its head, courting our affection. In a moment it was in our hand, and we fell into contemplation of all its sweetness and beauty. It is sad that these flowers are becoming so rare in Egypt. Our eyes were not to be gladdened by another until "twice twelve moons had waxed and waned," and in a marshy pond in a wide plain of South Africa, we once more came upon the lovely blue flower of the Lotus. In a moment, in the magic halls of memory there rose up a vision of that bygone day at Sakkarah, of every incident we had gone through: and of H. who was now with his regiment under the burning skies of India.

So even in our little lives, come shifting scenes and changes: and the events of this year are a reason why the very opposite should be found on next year's canvas.

That night we were to dine with Osman, and in due course found ourselves clasping his hand in friendship.

After our day's experience, it was delight and relief to find ourselves in this calm atmosphere, surrounded by all the charms of refined life; all the magic of Osman's eloquence, all the warmth of his hospitality. Again everything was so perfectly appointed that the resources of the *Arabian Nights* seemed to have been brought to our

aid, and we had only to summon the "Slave of the Lamp" to be surrounded by all the marvels of that wonderful world. Again the hours ran in golden sands.

"And now," said Osman, when the attendants had withdrawn, and from the coffee equipage a delicious incense was stealing upon the room, "before another word is said, tell me: have you not missed me during every hour of your excursion to Sakkarah?"

Our reply needs no record.

(*To be concluded.*)

SEVEN YEARS.

Seven years since we made up our quarrel!
I remember the little low room
And the garden out of the window,
And the second roses in bloom.

You had suffered—it may have been bravely,
But a pang never passed without trace,
And if any atonement was needed
It was there in the look of your face.

The sad eyes too wet to be lifted,
The sweet lips which quivered with pain,
Blotted all out.—Forgiveness?—O darling,
What need when I had you again?

Seven years!—life still rises against us,
And still keeps our footsteps apart;
Again the cold anguish of patience
Must silence the voice of the heart.

But I think of the tears that were hidden,
That day in the little low room,
And the garden out of the window,
And the second roses in bloom.

C. E. Meetkerke.

THE STREGA'S CURSE.

By Lady Margaret Majendie.

CHAPTER XXIV.

COLOMBA stood for one moment motionless; pressing her clenched hands on her breast, she suppressed the wild scream that rose in her choking throat. It passed like a flash of lightning, the recognition, the disappearance of the carriage.

With burning cheeks and ice-cold hands, she reached Nino's *atelier* with a whirlwind rush.

"Nino!" she cried, her voice finding vent in a hoarse shrillness, that made him leap to his feet in terror, "I have seen my husband!"

"Cola!"

"He has but now, this very moment, left your presence!"

Her panting breath and flaming eyes terrified him. He caught hold of her arm. "Not Gian Montana—impossible!"

"No—a thousand times no! Livio! the man who was with him!"

"Livio Baldova!—you are mad!"

"Livio!—my husband!—it is he."

"You are mad! What do you mean by such an assertion?" he cried furiously. He held her arm roughly. All his old love for her seemed to turn to horror, to disgust of this frantic woman.

"Is he also your friend?" she cried. "This coward, this base faithless scoundrel! Your friend!—yours, Nino?"

"That man a scoundrel? he is innocent, he is good. Girl, I tell you he is a saint!"

"He is my husband!"

He threw her from him almost violently.

"You lie!"

"He is my husband!"

"Cola, Cola, you do not know what you are saying," he cried. "There is no better man in Italy than that young fellow."

"Is it innocent, is it saint-like, to deceive a woman as he deceived me? To wed her with a half-marriage, to escape by a legal quibble from the consequence of his own action, to leave her deserted, scorned, maddened by his crime, to starvation, misery or suicide."

"You do not know of whom you are speaking."

"Not know him? He is my husband."

"It is false."

"Then prove it false, bring us face to face."

Nino covered his face with his hands.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "How am I to bear it?

Colomba did not wait, she rushed from the room; he could hear her fierce quick breathing, loud tramp of her foot as she paced backwards and forwards upstairs.

Nino sat down trembling, he cowered under the terrible conviction that was beginning to come home to him, as fact after fact rose before his mind remorselessly—the friendship between Gian and Colomba's lost husband, the passionate devotion of Gian to his friend, the similarity of Christian names.

Nino Dori's knowledge of Livio was not purely superficial; he thought he had penetrated into the innermost recesses of his young pure soul. Was this man, whom he reverenced as much as he loved, a false, living lie, an absolute hypocrite? Could such things be?

What should he do or say? Never in all his life had he known such pain as this caused him—this cruel conviction that was overtaking him that Livio was the guilty man.

He had condemned, hated, almost cursed the man who had been so false to Colomba!; he had sworn that some day he would bring home to this heartless scoundrel the sense of his crime. And he knew the man now; Cola had recognised him, there was no escape from the hideous discovery; and instead of cursing him, his first hought was only a prayer: "God help him! how can we protect him best?"

A shuddering horror seized on him, when he thought of his friend, a dying man, in the power of this woman. Where was Nino's love for her? his strong infatuation, gone in the terror of the thought.

Nino rose to his feet, pulled himself together, wondering why he felt so strangely shaken, and went downstairs.

Pippa was there, weeping with fear, for Colomba's face had frightened her.

"Where is Signora Colomba?" asked Nino.

"She has just gone out five minutes ago," answered the little woman, drying her eyes. "And we can do nothing, Nino, but leave our poor young Conte in God's hands."

"Then you know?" faltered Nino.

"I know, and the best help you can give him, is this, Padrone. Go to the Santo Spirito and kneel there, and ask God to help him, for He alone can. *Maria Santissima!* but she is a terrible woman."

Nino did not answer; alas! there was nothing to say. He went wearily back to his work, but his hand was unnerved and shaking. After one or two fruitless efforts he put down his tools, and got out a drawing-board and instruments to work at Livio's design. As he unrolled the plan, a sudden terrible meaning seemed to flash from it. This was Livio's shrine, destined to stand over the lifeless dust of the man he loved so well, and Livio had bidden him hasten. As he looked at the intricate design, he knew that it could never be done in time; that long, long before that fair work of art should be accomplished, the Angel of Death would have summoned him. Nino

threw out his arms in a kind of despair. He could not believe in the guilt of this fair young soul—he would not. His cry was like that of a stricken child.

"My friend! my friend!"

He hid his face on his outstretched arms with all the bitterness of a strong man's agony.

CHAPTER XXV.

Colomba was relentless. The sight of Livio had not softened her; indeed, now that some years had passed since the period of her brief love and courtship, the love had altogether died in her breast, and the craving for revenge had swallowed up all womanliness, all mercy.

As she looked on that face that had once been the very idol of her life, the same yet strangely spiritualised, she saw only in him the traitor who had deserted her, and at the moment the passion of hatred that surged up in her breast was almost enough to unhinge her reason.

The old coarse superstition in which she had been reared awoke again with that deadly hatred; she believed herself to be in possession of the means of revenge, and all the superficial civilisation of her convent life was thrust aside.

Colomba went to her room, changed her dress for a black one, covered her face with a thick veil, took from a carefully-locked trunk the long-cherished Strega's gift, and went out.

It was not difficult to find out the whereabouts of Santa Chiara. Colomba took a carriage, and in half an hour was driving there, rigid, upright, with her face set in lines of cruel, relentless determination behind her veil.

It had been early afternoon when the two friends left Florence, and by the time that Colomba reached the little village in the neighbourhood of the villa, it was almost dark.

It was too late to do anything that night and she went to the little rude inn and asked for a night's lodging.

She went to her little room, and did not leave it till about noon the next day, when she came downstairs more closely veiled than ever.

Colomba had made her plan; she asked whether visitors were ever allowed to see the fine old villa, famous alike for historical and artistic interest; and when she was told that she had only to apply to the porter, she went there with a firm swift step.

The porter told her that the family were all in the verandah, and he offered to conduct her through the rooms. Taking a bunch of keys he led the way, his long livery coat reaching to his heels.

They passed through one large salon after another, the garrulous

old man pointing out choice furniture and celebrated pictures. At the end of the long suite he opened a door, saying:

"And this is the room the young Count occupies now; he prefers it to his own apartments upstairs."

Colomba sank on a chair; a faintness, half real but yet purposely simulated, came over her.

"For the love of Heaven, a drop of wine!" she exclaimed, and the old man, terrified, rushed to get it, muttering to himself that these visitors were more trouble than they were worth.

Colomba found herself alone. With a rapid step she crossed the wide parquet floor of the room. Behind Lino's bed stood the tall pillar supporting his crucifix—a crimson silk cover was draped over the bed. It was standing out away from the wall.

Cola raised the silken coverlet, and with one quick movement hid under the pillow on which that night his young head would rest, the Strega's hideous gift.

She had hardly time to withdraw, and sink again into a chair, before the porter returned with a glass of wine.

Colomba drank it feverishly. She hastily placed a piece of gold in the hand of the astonished old man, and went swiftly away. She wanted to be alone, to give vent to the strangled moans she could no longer wholly suppress.

The little carriage sped swiftly on its way back to Florence.

She was tired, strangely tired; she thought with a certain restfulness of Nino's home, that he would receive her kindly and speak tenderly to her.

But when she arrived, Nino was out; Pippa, with eyelids swollen with crying, made no remark on her absence, waited on her with distant silence. When she asked where Nino was gone, she answered shortly: "To the Santo Spirito, on business."

Colomba went upstairs to the *atelier*, and threw herself into a chair, willing to wait, and yet feeling a curious dread of silence and solitude. She dared not think of what she had done. She had not sat there more than five minutes when the door was thrown open, and, quite suddenly and unannounced, Gian came in.

He had come to see her; a wild hope had sprung up in his breast that he might be able to manage her, to arrange something with her that might save his friend.

Colomba rose to her feet. Standing thus before him, with clasped hands and flashing eyes, even at that moment her magnificent beauty struck him.

"Is it you?" she said. "Have you come to take me to my husband?"

"I have come to see you, to entreat you to listen to my explanation," he cried.

"Ah! so you are at my mercy at last! I am listening. You wish me to spare you the public exposure of your treachery."

He shrugged his shoulders. "For myself," he said, "I care little—but for him."

"Ah! but why should I have pity on him? What pity had he on me?"

"It is on me, on me only, the blame should rest."

"Is my husband then a child—a dog—that he should obey you thus?"

"Let me speak."

In quick, forcible words he told her the history of Livio's illness, and utter oblivion of all that had taken place at Maiano. As he watched the crimson colour come and go in her cheek, her hands clasp and unclasp almost convulsively, he grew more and more eloquent; he described that terrible time when the whole family had hung for days and hours on the tidings from the sick-room, of how slowly and fitfully life had come flickering back into the fever-worn frame. He thought he was softening her heart, touching the womanliness that must be somewhere.

Colomba never interrupted him, she waited till he had finished, then raised her great eyes to him. As he saw their bold, fierce expression, hope died within him, and he was prepared for her slowly-hissed-out words:

"You dare to ask me to believe this lie?"

He sprang up. "Woman!" he cried, "what oath can I take that you will believe?"

"Even if you took the most solemn oath of your religion I should not believe you, your story is too wild."

Gian stood looking at her dumbly. What could he do or say?

"What can I say?" he exclaimed. "I repeat, Livio is absolutely without guilt. It is I who have done this thing. Must he suffer for it?"

"You shall be the instrument of his punishment," exclaimed Colomba fiercely. "You must tell him that I await him here. If your false story has any grain of truth in it, you will know best how to confess your own share in his vile treachery. If it is false, why then tell him that I will be revenged on him."

"You ask too much. I will not do it."

"Then to-morrow morning I shall be at Santa Chiara."

"The police shall stop you," exclaimed Gian.

Colomba drew herself up. "I will come protected by the law," she said; "you forget that you are speaking to Livio's wife."

Gian's face, as he stood looking at her, almost frightened her; men who have been driven to frantic actions have looked like that.

Colomba threw herself into a chair, she felt that her powers were beginning to fail.

"Gian," she said, "do not try to torment me;" there was something almost imploring in her voice. "He must be told, and at once. If your tale is true—ah Heaven! I never thought of that!—he may

love me yet. If it is the lie I take it to be, I must have my revenge. I must have him grovelling here at my feet, pleading for the forgiveness, the mercy, that shall stay my hand from sending him to the galleys."

"Fiend!"

"Listen! I give you the choice. Tell him yourself, or leave it to me. Be not fool enough to dream of escape. The right is on my side. Make your choice."

"God help me, it is made. I will do it!" he exclaimed.

"Then go, and let it be done at once."

Gian left the room with the bitterness of death in his soul.

Colomba stood for a moment with the look of triumph on her face with which she had dismissed him. Then some cold thought seemed to strike her, for she grew white, almost livid; she clutched at the table to support herself, and looked furtively over her shoulder as the guilty do.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Gian returned to Santa Chiara that night with a load on his heart, so great that Aimée read that there was something very much amiss, in his white sunken face and hollow eyes.

In the evening Livio, as was not unfrequent now, was faint and exhausted, and was glad to go to bed; while Donna Christina sat by him holding his hand, talking gently with him, and trying to quell in her breast the cold throbs of terror which would now and then assail her, when she could not hide from herself that he was daily wasting away more and more.

Gian and Aimée were alone, and she went up to him almost with the old childish unreserve and said:

"Dear Gian, perhaps I ought not to say it, but I wish I could comfort you. There is more troubling you than even dear Livio's weakness, is it not so? O Gian, you look to me as if you could bear very little more."

Poor Gian, he did not know that unconsciously he was pressing her gentle little hand in almost intolerable pain.

"If you can, let me help you," she murmured.

"Aimée, my dearest, my sweetest, it is a story of guilt that I must tell you."

"Not guilt of yours?—oh no."

"Yes, guilty deceit. How can I tell it to you?"

"I will help you if I can."

He saw the sweet blue eyes looking into his with gentle steadfast faith, and the impulse to tell all overmastered him, and in broken words he told her.

"I have sinned, Aimée—I have sinned; but it was for his sake. I

loved him so—I have loved him as no brother was ever loved before —I saw him broken in health, haunted by a delusion the source of which I only knew to be truth. Could I hand him over to that fiend of a woman? Aimée, tell me could I do it?"

Aimée was very white; the shock to her was very great; she looked at him with troubled eyes.

"Gian, it was wrong," she faltered.

"I know it! Heaven knows my life has been one long penance, and now—O merciful God!—he is dying."

"We must tell him, and leave the result in God's hands."

"I cannot! I cannot!"

"Gian," said little Aimée, her voice sounding curiously grave, "this great wrong must be repaired—for his sake, our Livio's sake. Do you not see?"

"I see it—know it, but my courage fails me. Aimée, you know this woman."

"And yet," said Aimée sorrowfully. "There must have been something in her to have attracted Livio's love."

"So I have told myself over and over again, but I cannot see it. Do you? She is magnificently beautiful, but to me her very beauty is repulsive."

"Dear Gian, it must be done. Strength will come. For your sake too—surely Livio's forgiveness is necessary for the peace of all your future life—of yours and of mine, Gian."

"My Aimée, mine!"

She drew back from the hand that would fain have clasped hers.

"Not yet, Gian; now we must only think of how best to undo the grievous wrong, and how best to spare Livio. Ah!"

For a sob burst from him of such agony that it made the tears stream from her eyes.

"Oh, Aimée, to hand him over to the power of that human fiend!"

"Dear Gian, God will take care of His own."

She hastily dried her eyes, for Donna Christina came into the room, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Gian," she said, "will you go to Livio? he is asking for you. He has gone to bed, he is very tired to-night."

Her face was pale. She said no more, and scarcely noticed that Gian did not speak, only bowed his head, passed her quickly, and left the room.

Livio was lying on his pillows as he entered. The light in the room came from two gilt sconces high up on either side of the Crucifix. The wax-lights threw all the shadows downwards, so that the solemn Saviour on the Cross seemed to be looking down with a marvellous compassion.

Livio's young face was all in shadow.

Gian came near to him, and drawing forward a chair took his thin

hand in both of his own. The still beauty of the scene brought quiet strength to his troubled spirit.

"You are tired, dearest Livio?"

"No—yes; not more than I often am. I am glad you are here, Gian."

"I could not leave you, dearest friend. I want to talk to you to-night about old days. Can you listen?"

"Yes—yes."

"Let me tell you a story." He paused. Livio lay quietly watching him, a vague uneasiness stirring his heart as he wondered what the meaning of the suppressed agitation of his friend's manner could be.

"It applies to ourselves," Gian went on. "But it is easier to speak like this. Do you remember when we first joined our regiment we used to take long walking tours together? Do you remember Maiano?"

Livio shook his head with a smile.

"Well, a strange thing happened at Maiano. I was there once with a comrade of mine, and I sprained my foot."

A sort of start came over Livio, but he did not interrupt.

"You have heard Nino speak of his beautiful ward, the wonderful peasant-beauty of Maiano?"

"Yes."

"Well, my friend stayed with me, for I could not move and—and fell in love with this Colomba, and he wished to marry her."

"It is a strange story."

"But the strangest part is still to come. I did all I could to stop it."

"You were always on the side of prudence, Gian," said Livio smiling; but Gian went on in the same toneless, monotonous voice:

"I could do nothing to prevent it, so I left the place. I did what I could to save my friend. I wrote to our colonel. I obtained the cancelling of his leave of absence, and I rushed back to find them just issuing from the church porch."

"Married?"

"By the Church, not by the civil rite. There was no time for remonstrance; to disobey the colonel would have been dishonour, and I forced him away."

"Poor little peasant-bride!" said Livio gently. Gian's voice grew hoarse and low.

"After that," he went on, "a very strange thing happened. My friend had not been two days at Pisa before he fell ill. I took him home to his mother to lie down and fight out the battle between life and death for weeks, nay, months. Livio, are you listening?"

"I hear," in the faintest whisper. Gian mustered up all his courage to go on.

"A thing happened in this illness which is a well-known though rare phenomenon. He awakened from the dream-world of delirium and

the whole episode—Mariano, his peasant-bride, his uncompleted marriage—had been blotted out of his memory for ever."

"And she?" Again that faint whisper.

"She waited for a time, for I—God forgive me, Livio—I sinned; but it was for you—for his sake—and I have known suffering to which hers cannot compare. You know the history. How she won the great prize—how she was educated with Aimée, and now—and now——"

But he did not finish. The utter stillness terrified him, and he bent down. Livio lay in a death-like swoon. To call for assistance, to summon Donna Christina, was the work of a moment.

When she came into the room, for one moment her eyes met his with a look of terror. He saw that Aimée had told her all. She spoke hurriedly to him:

"Gian, you have perilled your soul!"

"I know," he answered, "but oh, forgive me! It was for his sake."

She cast on him a look of anguish. It seemed to them all so appalling that such a shock should come on a dying man.

Then they busied themselves with restoratives, and by slow degrees life came back. Livio opened his large eyes and looked up.

"Gian," he said whisperingly.

"He is here, my own, my darling."

"Gian, God will forgive you as I do—kiss me, Gian."

"Livio! oh, my Livio!"

As Gian bent over him and kissed his brow the feeble hand held him fast.

"Darling," whispered his mother, "we will take care of you—you shall not see her."

"She will not hurt me," he said gently; "poor Colomba, how she must have suffered! We must make all right for her to-morrow; I cannot talk now. I am tired, mother; it is all so strange—so very strange."

They watched by him, as presently he fell asleep—a quiet sleep unbroken by the cough which so often spoiled his rest.

Gian would not leave him. All through the long hours of the night he sat watching the sleeper, praying, pleading that God in His great mercy would protect him from more suffering.

And under the sleeping man's pillow lay hidden the hideous work of the Strega's curse.

CHAPTER XXVII.

At ten o'clock on the following morning Gian met the ladies at breakfast. His haggard looks and strained eyes betrayed that he had been up all night; there was about him a kind of absorption, as of a man living in the midst of a great fear.

Don Giacopo was paying a long visit to friends in Rome, and had been absent for some time.

"Livio is getting up," said Gian. "He has breakfasted, he will hear of no remonstrance."

"I know," said Donna Christina. "Gian, you will go with him, you will not leave him!"

"Go? where is he going?" cried Aimée, looking from one to another.

"He is going down to Florence to meet her." Donna Christina lowered her voice that the horror she felt of Colomba might not betray itself too much.

"Oh, Gian, this is too hard!"

"It is his wish," said Gian gloomily, "and we cannot gainsay him."

"And what does he say of her?" asked Aimée tearfully.

"He says," said his mother: 'Poor girl, she has suffered much, and I can do nothing to atone.' He is too good, he is a saint, my poor boy. The most painful thing to him is his failure to remember anything of the circumstances; he forces his memory in vain, and we must take the greatest care to prevent him from connecting this Colomba with the horrible dream-wife of his imagination."

Aimée shuddered. To Gian only she could say her inmost fears. It was indeed a thought of misery that their darling should be in the power of a woman such as the Colomba whom she knew. To his mother she could only whisper platitudes—how any woman would love and pity him, that no one could fail to be touched by his resolution to see her at once, his innocence of all conscious wrong against her.

Presently he came in. The day was warm, but his servant, frightened by the coldness of his hand, had persuaded him to put on a loose coat lined with dark furs. He was smiling his own bright sunny smile, as he greeted them all with even more than his usual affection.

When the carriage came, his mother came to him, and kissed him passionately; Aimée also put up her sweet face to kiss him; it was as if with their yearning love they would give him strength to go through what lay before him.

"Take care of him, Gian!" whispered the poor mother.

Gian found Livio leaning on him as he had never leant before, almost clinging as they went down the steps. When in the brougham he said to him:

"Livio, let us go back. You are not fit for this."

Livio only smiled. "No," he said, "it is true I am not fit for it, but it is due to her. She has much to forgive."

Hardly was the carriage out of sight, when the whole house of Santa Chiara was in commotion. Donna Christina and Aimée had scarcely returned into the salon when a storm of wild shrieks came to their ears, so shrill and loud that, terrified, they flew to see what it meant. The cries issued from Livio's room; half the household were assembled, pressing to the spot in agitation.

Two of the women had been making Livio's bed; they had thrown off the pillows, and there, on the white sheet, was lying something which had caused their cries.

"Do not touch it for the love of heaven! Signora, do not approach!" they screamed; and the valet stood trembling, and signing himself with the cross.

"But what is it?" cried Aimée.

"It is a spell—the accursed work of some Strega," cried the man with chattering teeth, "and our young Conte has slept with it under his pillow," and he broke into a perfect howl.

"A foolish superstition," said Donna Christina firmly, and she advanced with some curiosity to look at it.

It lay on the white drapery, a thing of horror and disgust—a little wreath, a mockery of the beautiful, a hideous garland made up of dull dead grasses, of strange reptile skins, of fangs of some dead animal, of dried clay, and long locks of evil-coloured lifeless hair.

Donna Christina shrank back with a shudder.

"It is well known," sobbed one of the women, "that within one moon after this our young Conte will be in Paradise."

A look of anguish came into the mother's eyes. She could not contradict, or attempt to unravel cause and effect. Her voice rose firm and calm as she spoke to the weeping, frightened group:

"Friends," she said, "cast away that horrible thing; no harm can come of it except to the bad heart of the sender. Do not be foolish, have faith. What, on earth, can hurt one who dwells, as your young master does, under the shadow of the Crucifix?"

They did not answer, Italian superstition was too strong, and Donna Christina, strong in her own faith, drew Aimée away.

"There is only one person who can have done this," she whispered, with a cold fear, not of the thing, but of the savage hand that had striven to work the deadly revenge.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The carriage drove swiftly down into Florence. As they passed through the great gates into the busy active world, Gian noticed that the white, almost grey colour of Livio's face increased fearfully.

"My Livio," he said suddenly, "you must let me prepare the way for you. Do not go straight to Nino's house. Rest somewhere first, and let Nino and me prepare Colomba for your coming. Believe me, it will be best."

Livio's words were hardly audible. "Thank you, Gian; it is a grievous confession, but I am afraid."

"Where will you wait, dearest fellow?"

"In Santo Spirito; Nino told me that the great work is there now. It will be peaceful, and help me. Let me go there, Gian."

Gian bade the coachman drive there. It was near to the Borgo San Jacopo, so that he reflected that he need not leave his friend for many moments.

At the door of the church he was again conscious of Livio's difficulty in walking, but his strength seemed to return somewhat when they were in the church, and leaning heavily on his friend he went to the side-chapel on which he had set his heart.

It was a quiet sunless day and the whole church was wrapped in its own characteristic greyness, except where the lights shone like golden beads round the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. On the side-altar Livio saw Nino's great work.

"Leave me here," he whispered. He would have knelt but he was too weak. In fearful anxiety, Gian supported him on to one of the low oak seats. He could not bear to leave him; but after a moment's rest, he turned round to him with a slight reassuring smile and said, "Go now, Gian, and do not be long!" and Gian obeyed.

Livio sat leaning back, his head against one of the carved pilasters on the wall. His eyes were fixed on that wonderful Crucifix. His thoughts left the dark world and its pressing cares and troubles, so that it seemed to him, that all this agony of life that he had grown too weak to bear, was absorbed away from him, and the burden was taken from his shoulders. A little while, a very little while, and there would be rest. Even now at this moment had come upon him a foretaste of the ineffable peace that was so near.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GIAN, when he left his friend in the church of Santo Spirito, did not allow himself to pause for a moment to consider what he meant to do or say. His one idea was to make all speed and return to Livio. The greatest anxiety pressed on him, he would not waste a moment, he must get back.

He strode to the Borgo San Jacopo and rang the bell sharply.

Pippa, with eyes swollen with crying, came to the door. "The Signora was in," she said; "the Padrone was at work. If Gian would go to the *atelier* she would let the Signora know."

Gian went upstairs. Nino started up when he saw him; Gian was shocked at the sight of his haggard face.

"Dori!" he exclaimed, "will you not take my hand? See, let me explain."

Very quickly he told of Livio's strange loss of memory. Nino understood, recognised the truth of the story at once; for a moment he covered his face with his hands, and Gian heard his fervent "Thank God! thank God!"

But there was not a moment for him to rejoice over the vindication of his friend's character, his renewed faith in the man he loved so

dearly, for the door was thrown open, and Colomba came in. It was the hour of her triumph; there was a fierce bold light in her eyes, a strange force in her gait. Her cheeks were crimson. She had donned again the ruddy velvet she loved, and the false brilliants sparkled on her hand.

A sharp shudder ran through Gian's frame, but he controlled himself.

"Signora," he said, "you did not believe me yesterday; to-day, you must, you shall believe me. I have told Livio Baldova the truth."

"And he cannot, he dare not, deny it."

"He does not wish to deny it; he believes my word."

A shrill laugh, loud, uncontrolled, burst from Colomba's lips. "So he shelters himself," she cried, "behind his lost memory!"

With a great effort Gian composed himself sufficiently to speak calmly:

"He makes no attempt to do so; he came with me to-day."

Nino leapt to his feet. "He is here?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I left him at Santo Spirito. He is coming."

"And he sent you on to prepare his way?" cried Colomba.

She was surprised by a fierce gesture from Nino.

"Yes," said Gian. The thought rushed over him, could he say or do anything to disarm or soften this girl? He looked up at her, and his heart died within him, but he spoke softly, almost imploringly:

"Livio's one thought has been, 'Poor girl, how she must have suffered! poor little peasant bride.'"

But not a quiver passed over Colomba's face, so strong and fierce was the long-standing sense of ill-usage that it could not now give way to compassion. She felt herself alone against the world; even her faithful slave Nino had turned against her. Once more that hateful, unmirthful laughter broke from her lips.

Nino roughly caught her arm. "I will not have it!" he exclaimed; "until Colomba comes to a better frame of mind, he shall not see her. I have some authority. I claim it as the due of a life's devotion. This is my house and I will forbid it."

Colomba sat down sullenly. "Do as you will," she said, "go, both of you, and fetch my husband. We will arrange matters between us; your right of interference is at an end."

Nino took down his hat, and led the way downstairs. Out in the street he put his hand on Gian's arm and said, "It must not be allowed, an interview would half kill him. Signor Gian, you must take him home; the matter must be left to lawyers. I will manage her."

Gian shook his head sorrowfully, no one could gainsay Livio. They arrived.

Nino raised the great leathern curtain that hung before the church door and the two went in.

All was perfectly still in the church, very dark and cold; their

footsteps echoed on the marble pavement as Gian led the way to the chapel.

Livio was sitting where his friend had left him, but he was leaning forward with his brow on the desk before him. Very gently Gian laid a cold hand on his shoulder, but he did not move; then Nino, white as snow, came forward also, and together they raised him.

He seemed to have been in a sort of sleep or swoon; his eyes opened, and he smiled as he saw their anxious faces bending over him.

"You are ill, Livio?" said Gian hoarsely.

"No, I am only tired. You have come for me? See, I am ready. Give me your arm, Nino. It is nothing, I am only weak."

"You will go home now? I will bring you wine to the carriage, dear Signore."

"Home? oh no, to your house, Nino. I must see Colomba. See, I am stronger now."

Between them they supported him to the carriage; again both entreated him to yield to them and go home; he only shook his head, and gave his own orders to the servants.

When they arrived at the Borgo San Jacopo, Nino supported him into Pippa's parlour on the ground floor; he hastily brought wine, and held it to his pale lips. Livio swallowed a few drops with difficulty. They placed him in a large leathern arm-chair. Gian and Nino stood by him. Pippa saw what was coming, and, with the tears choking her, stole away unbidden to summon a priest.

"And now," said Livio, raising himself, "will you call Colomba?"

The two men looked at each other.

"There is no time to lose," said Livio gently. Nino did not speak again, but quietly left the room.

In the *atelier* upstairs, Colomba sat watching and waiting, and there was something in her fierce eyes, in the tawny colouring of her dress, that resembled the tiger, waiting, watching, for its prey.

As she waited, in her inmost soul she scoffingly thought that they dared not face her—dared not come to her again.

But when her patience was all but exhausted, the door was pushed aside, and Nino came in.

Something in his face cowed her. She staggered to her feet.

"Why do you look so strange?" she cried. "Where is my husband? Have you brought him?"

Nino answered hoarsely: "Cola, I have brought you sad tidings; he is here but——"

"Then he has not escaped me again!" she cried. "Something in your manner made me fancy——"

"Hush! for your own sake be silent. Livio Baldora is here, he has sent for you. Be patient; he is very ill."

"Let me go to him at once," she said. "We must find truth at last. I will see him face to face."

She put Nino aside, and went rapidly downstairs.

Colomba stood before her husband.

She swept in, the bright colour in her cheeks, her magnificent eyes shining with excitement, burning words of anger and disdain on her lips, but she stopped short. The first sight of Livio gave her a sudden overwhelming shock. Nino, close by her side, saw the sudden revulsion of feeling—the awe, almost fear, which arrested her harsh words and fierce movement forward.

Livio put out his hand, and caught Gian's convulsively. For one second, only one, the strange panic came over him, with which he used to wake from the dream of his delirium ; then he mastered it. This was no dream, he was meeting face to face an awful crisis in his life.

Gian responded, as he was ever wont to respond, to that mute appeal for help. He put his strong right arm round the feeble frame, and held his white hand fast.

Pippa came creeping in, bringing with her a gentle quiet priest, who seeing that some strange scene was enacting, withdrew to wait until he should be summoned.

There was a breathless silence. Then Livio spoke. It was a whisper so low that only ears strained by awful nervous tension could have heard every word that he uttered.

"Colomba, you poor poor child. I have wronged you deeply. It was not my fault ; some one will explain it to you—my lost memory——"

He paused. Colomba stood motionless, bound by the spell of that great solemn weakness.

"But to you," he went on, "it must have seemed that I—I was faithless, cruel ; for this I would atone."

Pippa, seeing that livid pallor coming over his face, moistened his lips with wine.

"Colomba, give me your hand. It is dark, I cannot see—your hand——"

But Colomba stood spell-bound—they dared not break that spell. She stood with fixed eyes and clasped hands.

Livio's hand groped for hers for a moment, then he spoke again : "Colomba, I ask your forgiveness—poor child—poor little peasant-bride—forgive——"

The priest had entered now.

There was a deep solemn silence ; then his voice arose commending the departing soul.

Livio lay on Gian's faithful breast. Nino, on his knees, held fast his hand.

One or two long sighs, and all was over, the gentle spirit was at rest.

CHAPTER XXX.

Nino and Pippa drew Colomba from the room. For a few moments she stood as if petrified; it was awful to see the fixed glare of her eyes, the lips apart, the teeth clenched.

"Not dead?" her voice rose into a wild scream.

"Cola—yes, God has called him home."

An awful cry rang through the house; Cola fastened both her hands in her hair and tore it wildly.

"Dead! I have done it, I—dead! so soon! and it is I who have done it! It is the Strega's curse!"

The cries grew wilder and more awful.

Pippa ran for the doctor. Before night Colomba was raving in delirium. For ever and ever it seemed to her that old Lalla was leaning over her, dictating to her how, and when, and where, her own hand should bring down on her husband death from the Strega's curse.

CONCLUSION.

They laid their darling in the grave, and the years rolled on.

After Livio's death Gian Montana went abroad, and for three long years he did not seek to see his friends. Though, womanlike, they would have stretched out loving arms to him, words of all-forgetting pardon, he could not forgive himself.

When at length, calmed and soothed and at peace with himself, he came back, he found Aimée waiting for him, and they were married and lived ever with Donna Christina—true children to the lonely mother.

Nino worked on in the Borgo San Jacopo a lonely life, blessed by the poor, the sad, the little children, and under his hands grew slowly a shrine so wondrously intricate and beautiful that strangers came from far and wide to wonder and admire.

Colomba had left him and told him not whither she was going.

One morning, when the east winds were tearing down the valleys, and the white snow hung in shroud-like masses on the mountain-sides, Colomba once more returned to Maiano. There was a strange fierce restlessness about her. She did not stay long, She brought money with her—money enough to endow her rough kindred with large peasant wealth before she went away.

Maddalena was the only person to whom she showed affection; to her only she confided whither she was bound.

It was on the morning of her departure; Colomba bade her sister come with her once more to the old trysting place, the gnarled carouba tree.

The wind swept by them, moaning and sighing through the hills.

Maddalena drew her shawl tighter across her breast, the tears were in her patient eyes.

"Can you not stay, my Cola? See, you need not live with us. Take the big house by the Presbytere; I will wait on you, serve you, and love you as none other in this world will do."

"No, Maddalena, no. Listen to me. I have gone from one confessional to another, to purge away my sin. They all say the same: they mock at the Strega and her spells; they say it was not I, not I, who killed him—it was God's hand, not mine."

"It is true, my Cola."

"It may be true, but still—he slept that night with his head on that accursed thing, and on the morrow he was dead—dead, and I saw him die. They say I did not do it—not I."

"Stay with me; I will help you to overcome this terrible remorse."

"I can't stay. I must expiate my sin, and I have found the means. When I leave you to-day, I shall never look upon your face again. I go to Rome to be received into the Convent of the Sepolt Vive."

"Into a convent?—you, Cola?"

"Yes, the Order is strict. I shall be dead, dead to the warm world of life and light; my daily life will be one penance, my nightly rest in my own coffin."

"Oh, my little Cola, my sister!"

"Will not this be expiation, shall I not find peace?"

"God grant it, child."

"Pray for me, Maddalena—pray as you never have prayed before."

But Maddalena's answer was choked in tears.

With wild, clinging, passionate kisses, Cola left her, and went for the last time away from her mountain home.

No tidings ever came back from her living tomb. The funeral bell tolled heavily as she entered it; henceforth dead to the world, no soul without would know when her soul returned to its Maker.

And night and day, from Nino in the busy town, and Maddalena in her humble hard-working life, prayers went up to heaven that the wild soul might find peace!

THE END.

A WOMAN'S JUDGMENT.

SKETCH I.

A FIREWORK GALA.

THE simultaneous explosion of a dozen rockets shed a vivid light on a sea of upturned human faces.

Nature had always interested me more than Art, especially in her highest work, humanity. Fireworks could be seen frequently, but rarely was there such an opportunity for studying my fellow-creatures as this moment when the flash caught the real and unguarded expression on their features. I gave one sweeping glance, and was arrested instantly by one face.

The owner of it was of the same sex as myself, a woman, who had had, perhaps, ten or a dozen years less of life than I. Her marvellous beauty was the magnet that chained my eyes. Her delicate profile was full in my line of vision, and the soft ring-like curls lay on a forehead white as marble. But the pose of the small head, the resolutely closed lips, the coldness of the expression, revealed to me that she was ruled by pride.

I was interested in spite of myself. Could such a woman feel the throb of heartache? The agony of loneliness? Did she feel and suffer as I did? No, her face seemed to proclaim her one of the goddesses among women, who have men's hearts offered at their shrine, and the world at their feet, but who do not know the thrill of love, or the anguish of solitude.

At the next glorious auroral burst my gaze involuntarily turned to her again, and I saw she was accompanied by a tall, broad-shouldered man, whose back was towards me.

When he spoke to her she scarcely answered. His air was certainly propriety; they were without doubt man and wife. Only one among the army of dupes blinded by a little glamour, a few soft words before marriage. Another victim married for the sake of his name and money.

"How is one ever to get to know a woman?" The words had been spoken to me rather bitterly, a week or two before, by a friend of the male sex; it was strange how hard they seemed to find it. I knew and could judge a woman at a glance, and should never have been entrapped into marriage with an iceberg, because it happened to be beautiful to the eye.

At this time I was absolutely alone in the world. Possessed of a small allowance sufficient for my bare wants, I worked in order to add a little butter to my bread. I had travelled abroad a good deal,

and was a fair linguist; in this capacity I went daily from house to house to drill French verbs and German declensions into unwilling little heads. My great pleasure was a trip abroad once a year, for which I saved every extra penny. My respectable age insured me against insult. Once I had been romantic, selfish, and impetuous. Now I was practical, cautious, and interested in others; consequently where I had been miserable, I was now equably happy. I will not say I could not have married if I had chosen, but when I was of an age to do so, my fancies were too extravagant, my ideals too high, to find their counterpart in any living man.

A face in a crowd; nothing more; but it served as a text for a mental sermon on the foolishness and gullibility of mankind all the way to my lodgings. The rooms I had taken were new ones, and it was my first day in them, as it chanced. At the rather unusually late hour for me of eleven I turned in, and fell placidly asleep.

SKETCH II.

MIDNIGHT.

A LOUD report, sounding like a pistol shot, close to the head of my bed, awoke me suddenly. My heart was beating so violently I almost fainted. Dead silence followed, then a low moan, so full of heart-broken anguish, that I sat bolt upright, before I had time to frame with my dry lips the question, "Any one there?" I realised that these sounds came from the next room, which was evidently separated from mine by only a thin partition. These rooms were at the very top of the house, and I had understood from my landlady that I was the only occupant of that landing. Was suicide being committed? or murder? The moan had not been followed by any other. The cold perspiration came out on my forehead as I realised I ought to arouse some one, and make what I had heard known; yet though not naturally very nervous, I had a strong disinclination to pass the door of the next room, and still more to traverse all the creaking stairs. True to human nature, I temporised. After three minutes' long silence came a low deep oath, and then a rustling and a thud, as if some heavy body had been dragged out of bed, and dropped. A weary woman's voice said, "I believe I am dying; you have killed me."

I could stand no more. With a light spring I was out of bed, and down the passage.

The moonlight was flooding through a staircase window, and lit up the landing. The door of the room adjoining mine was violently opened, a white night-gowned figure stumbled heavily, as if pushed from behind, and sank in a heap against the banisters. Spell-bound

I waited. The door was shut, and there seemed no probability of its being opened at once.

Timidly advancing, I crept nearer. Two white hands were clasped round one of the supports of the banisters as if they would meet through the wood. A white tearless face met mine more with grave inquiry than any expression of wonder or pain. It was the woman I had seen by the lights of the rockets. It was I who felt abashed and apologetic before her quiet composure. "I came out of my room hearing a noise. Will you come in with me?" I asked.

She assented and tried to move. It was evident she was badly hurt. The absurdity of restraining my just indignation came over me. As I drew her left arm through mine I noticed her wedding-ring.

"This man, your husband, does he often act in this brutal way?"

"Never before—never. I want to ask you not to mention anything——" Here she stopped for a moment, and her lips worked as she suppressed a spasm; then she spoke steadily again, though she was utterly unable to control the brimming tears which dropped slowly down. "I am worn out, or I shouldn't be so weak;" again she stopped to control herself. "My husband and I both have hot tempers; we are not suited."

I had waited, and now as I made room for her in my own bed, I felt suddenly as if I were entertaining an angel unawares; my own tears were not far from the surface. "Please make yourself quite comfortable. No one shall be the wiser through me."

In spite of my mingled feelings, physical weariness overcame me, and I slept more than once at intervals before the morning lightened. The first dim light shone full on the white face and sleepless wide eyes of the woman by my side.

"He is gone," she said.

"Who? your husband?"

"Yes. I knew it would be so, and I could not be the one to leave him." She turned her face to the wall, and lay motionless.

It was as she conjectured. Probably fearing an exposure, he had left her, taking with him, however, only his own property; all her rings and money lay untouched. We contrived between us to hush the matter up, and before any of the household were about, she was back in her own room. She paid her bills, and gave notice to leave, and when I came home in the evening I found her waiting for me. A strange coincidence had given me an interest in her, and when I found that she was absolutely friendless, I accepted the position Providence had assigned to me, and we became partners. I found that she had a beautiful and cultivated voice, and great skill in music. The connection I had formed among my French and German pupils served for an introduction, and in two years' time I should have found it hard to go back to my lonely life.

Time only deepened my admiration for her character. Naturally tender-hearted, gentle, intensely sensitive and artistic I could only

judge of the torments she had endured, which had brought all the harder, stronger side to the surface and kept it there. Never once did she betray her husband's cruelty. She had been married six years she told me, had married in defiance of all her family, who had consequently disowned her. The pride and determination which had lain dormant in her sweet sunny nature during girlhood, had urged her to take her own way about her marriage, and had kept her up when she learnt her mistake. This I judged; in all other matters she was frankness itself, but on the one subject of her husband, and her wedded life, she was silent.

SKETCH III.

ON THE CLIFFS.

Two years after I had joined partnership with my gentle companion Elfrida, we took a small cottage on the sea-coast near a large town. This was for our summer holiday. To make the change more complete we agreed to do our own cooking, washing, and dusting, and have no maid to interfere with our harmony. One glorious afternoon in August I sat on the cliffs outside our abode, sketching. I was in charge; Elfie had gone to the town on business, and would not return for some hours. The day was too still and peaceful even for the effort of sketching. Never had I seen the sea so calm; up to the very base of the cliffs it lay like a gigantic lake with hardly a ripple on its surface. My block lay idly on my knee, my colour-box was untouched. A footfall recalled me to myself, and I hastily began an appearance of work. Instead of passing on, a man's shadow fell on the ground before me, and a refined voice asked courteously: "May I speak to you for a moment?"

Hastily and suspiciously I confronted him. His face disarmed me. It was such a pleasant, sunburnt face. "Yes," I answered.

"It must seem great impertinence on my part, but I trust to your good nature. Are you the occupant of that cottage?" and he pointed back along the path he had come.

"Yes."

He hesitated a moment. "It must seem strange, most strange, my addressing you thus. I am in great straits. Frankly, I am a deserter from the ranks, and unless you shelter me, I shall be caught before nightfall."

Perhaps that vein of romance which I had thought altogether overcome still lay somewhere. I looked at him and again his bright smile overcame my scruples. I could not help smiling in response. "You may come," I answered. I resolved in my old-maidishness to turn the key on him in an empty room. My impulse was to trust him; but I have learnt to disregard impulses. He made no objection; only

asking me for a book with which to wile away the time. He seemed to trust *me* at all events. I noticed as I left him how shabby and worn his clothes were, a fact which his bearing and appearance had hitherto rendered unobtrusive.

After I had been back in my place for an hour, I was startled by men's voices, and one of the police constables whom I knew well by sight, accompanied by two men in plain clothes, came to a halt beside me. The former saluted, and respectfully asked how long I had been in my present position. When he heard I had been there for three hours, he inquired if I had seen or heard any one pass. My heart beat violently as I answered "No," for though it was the literal truth, it was rather too near the wind for comfort. The interview over, the men still pursued their way though evidently a little thrown off the trail. At five o'clock I re-entered the house. My visitor greeted me with alacrity, and seemed interested in hearing what I had to tell him. He did not say much, but what he did say carried with it a conviction that his gratitude was too deep for words. "I have arranged for a small boat to take me off to-night to a fishing smack, and I hope to be out of their reach to-morrow," he added.

"Isn't that very dangerous? Those men are sure to return by this road; there is no other."

"I am not off until it is dark."

"What are you doing until then?"

"The tide is lower now; I can find concealment on the shore."

Having risked something for this man, I, woman-like, began to wish to risk more. "If you like," I suggested with some diffidence, "you may remain here."

He laughed carelessly. "The risk is too great, the price too heavy to pay. Those men, not having found me, might return, and insist on searching here. There is a penalty attached to harbouring deserters."

"But if I am willing to run the risk?"

"I am not, on your behalf, and prefer that the balance of danger should be on my side." Thus he left me.

With strange interest I watched for the return of the men; they came and passed. He would have been safe. I regretted having let him go.

Elfie returned, and though I tried to make light of it, she saw how excited I was.

"You sober, staid old person to be so moved by a tramp, and very likely an impostor. Never tell me again that you are practical."

"Some persons' manners carry conviction; and whatever that man was, he was no impostor."

"I was angry with myself for being so much moved about such a trifle. I lay awake half the night wondering if he were taken.

My gravity next morning was the subject of remark.

"Don't scoff, Elfie. I am so sorry for that poor fellow. I'm sure his misfortunes are not his own fault."

That evening's post brought me a letter."

"DEAR MADAM—

Fate was against me. In spite of your goodness, which I shall never forget, I was taken on the seashore an hour before the boat started. Though no longer a free man, I have the satisfaction of feeling that I have at least not involved you in this matter.—Yours gratefully, .

"A PRISONER."

Triumphantly I handed it to Elfie. "He must have had difficulty in getting it sent," I said. "Where is your impostor now?" She was silent for some time, so long that I thought she was annoyed at the proof of the truth of the story.

"It is my husband," she said at last. "I should have thought you, my Nestor, would have been too wise to be deceived by him."

Thoroughly vexed at this assumption of superiority, I answered sharply: "How am I to know what to believe? There are always two sides to every story."

The next time I spoke she answered me with no shadow of ill-temper, but her eyes reproached me silently.

SKETCH IV.

BY THE WINDOW.

WHEN I had been in bed that night for about half-an-hour, my conscience pricks became too keen for endurance. It was so unwomanly to taunt Elfie after the generous silence she had maintained as to her husband's cruelty. I sprang up impulsively and went to seek forgiveness. She was crouching by the window sobbing in great deep-drawn breaths. Her proud lips were tightly compressed in the effort to let no sound escape her, but the tears had made little red marks upon her white skin. No longer now a composed and dignified goddess, such as I had always known her, but a weeping, shrinking woman in the hour when she most needs sympathy. I had not imagined that she could feel so much; her self-control I, in my impulsiveness, had mistaken for want of heart. My conscience smote me desperately, it was I who had wounded her. Without a word my arms were round her, and my tears began to flow in sympathy.

"It is all right now, dear," she said gently. "As long as you believe in me, I can bear; but when you began to think I might have endured——"

She broke off suddenly.

"My darling, I know at last. I am stupid and blundering, Elfie; your nature is too high for mine to understand; when you never told

me anything he had done, I sometimes thought—oh forgive me, dear—it was because you had nothing to tell."

Her lips formed in a quivering smile. She laid one hand on mine. I had oftened noticed that the little finger was misshapen, crooked.

"He did it," she said quietly. "His very danger was his fascination. I can forgive you for being deceived. Then think how deceived I was. Clever, good-looking, versatile, interesting, with such noble sentiments: and I still believe he means these things at the time he says them. But he was born without a heart—that's not his fault, is it? Yet he has absolutely no heart. Cruelty is pleasure to him, yet the world's opinion is necessary to his happiness, and he took care not to show this openly. Are there many like him? Why are they born? I can't understand it. It wouldn't matter if it was only what I suffered, but others must have suffered too, and it is so sad for him. He has no principle. They told me that, my people did, but I believed in him, and I ran away with him. I didn't know he was cruel, and he is so winning, so fascinating. It is so sad—you know what I mean: the thought that there can be no hope for him sometimes nearly kills me."

She stopped, and for ten minutes, clasped in each other's arms, we were silent. It was in my heart to say, "Well, if he is a devil, you are an angel," but the latter part of the sentence only escaped me.

"It comforts me to hear you say it, though it is not true," she whispered. "I am so weak, I ought perhaps to go back to him, but you see he gambled during that last year I was with him, and lost every penny of his money, so he could not keep me. It is so weak of me to want to justify myself like this," she added through her tears.

"Weak! my darling, it is a good thing there are not more women like you in the world; we average human beings can rub along, but spirits as noble and pure as yours are bound to suffer here, and can only look for their reward in that other land where, as Whyte Melville says, 'their grapes are ripened, their harvest is yellow, the light is already shining on them from the golden hills of heaven.'"

G. E. Mitton.

MADAME DE GENLIS.

THERE have been many remarkable men and women whose minds have developed and whose geniuses have bloomed in a soil the very opposite to that which we should have expected to produce them. Giotto was a shepherd lad; Whitefield, the great preacher, began life as a waiter in an inn. But this was not the case with the subject of this paper, who grew up amid the very surroundings that most fostered her talents.

It was in the Château of St. Aubin in Burgundy that she first saw light. They baptised her, according to the fashion of the time, with a long string of euphonious Christian names, all of which however have dropped from her as useless incumbrances, and we know her as Madame de Genlis alone.

Her father was a M. de St. Aubin, who somehow, perhaps by virtue of a neglected title in the family, managed to blossom into a marquis; and her mother was a pretty, witty lady, endowed with such superabundant animal spirits and vitality that we find her, even when she was far advanced in life, rising from her bed at an hour when most elderly dames would have been supposed to be snoring peacefully, to take part actively in a theatrical entertainment. The mania for acting among the French of that period can only be compared to the mania for writing we see among the English in our own day.

Mdlle. de St. Aubin was infected with the national fever for acting at a very early age, and in her case it happened to unfold and educate some of her brightest intellectual gifts. This taste for acting remained with Madame de Genlis throughout her life. She never actually acted in public, but she was always engaged in a series of amateur theatricals; indeed she acted so well on the boards, that almost insensibly she grew to be always acting in her daily life. She put herself into an elegant pose the moment she came into company; she had well-turned little graceful, artificial sentences always ready for every possible occasion at the end of her tongue; she walked and moved as if she had ceaselessly the eyes of men directed upon her; she schooled each feature, so that every expression of her face was kept under command, and used at will; indeed, acting was so habitual to her, that it seems to have become a second nature, and it was quite impossible to know where the actress ended and the woman began.

It is in fact very difficult to discern what is real and what is false in examining her character and making a word picture of it.

But to return to Madame de Genlis in her early youth.

Her intellect was peculiarly precocious, and no doubt her achievements as an actress in her childhood served to awake up mind and memory in her first years, and strengthen both. She displayed an

immense appetite for knowledge; nothing that they taught her came amiss to her vigorous young mental digestion: music, the classics, needlework, chemistry, geography, carpentry, were all learned by her one after another, and all with success.

This restless eagerness to gain new acquirements was throughout her life one of the marked characteristics of Madame de Genlis. We see her learning to make artificial flowers in middle age, and taking lessons in embroidery with seed pearls, one of the fashionable industries of ladies in that day, when she was already an elderly woman. She had a vast and healthy vitality in her nature, and this was doubtless one of the secrets of her success in educating young people.

Religion was to have its share in the many-sided bringing up of the future governess of royalty.

She was taken by her parents to a conventual establishment, and made a member of it under the title of a "chanoinesse." These youthful chanoinesses enjoyed certain immunities and privileges, by virtue of which her name was changed, and from henceforth she was known as Madame de Lancy, and not as Mdlle. de St. Aubin. The little chanoinesses were instructed in theology, and were supposed to acquire a taste for the cloister; but this latter was certainly, in Madame Lancy's case, of an extremely superficial nature. Throughout all Madame de Genlis' career she decidedly showed no inclination for the life of a nun; the mere thought of the loquacious, active-minded lady with her airs and her attitudes immured in a cell, calls up a smile at its incongruity.

Thus time went on till Madame de Lancy—as she was styled in polite society—was seventeen; she was now as charmingly pretty a girl as ever turned the heads of a score of adorers at once, and gave a dozen dowagers with marriageable daughters fits of the jaundice with envy.

Her delicate features and large eyes were all sparkling with wit and intelligence; her figure was that of a sylph; her dainty feet seemed to be always treading on air by use and right, her step was so light and springy; her slender white fingers appeared to be formed for the harp, on which instrument she in fact excelled.

About this period M. de St. Aubin took it into his head to see something of foreign lands; perhaps after the fashion of many French husbands, and, it may be, just a few English ones, he was a trifle tired of domestic bliss with Madame.

In the Channel the vessel he was in was captured by an English privateer, and very shortly he found himself a prisoner in a country town in Cornwall, where, if he had been really guilty of any shortcomings against Madame, he must have repented them mournfully at leisure. When he was just on the point of committing suicide for sheer *ennui*, he suddenly heard himself, to his delight and astonishment, addressed in the French tongue. He found that he had a compatriot in Cornwall; a certain M. de Genlis; and the two men

became great friends. When at last they were allowed to return to France the intimacy continued, and M. de St. Aubin introduced his friend to his wife and daughter.

M. de St. Aubin did not long survive his involuntary stay in England; he died soon after his return to his family. Hereupon Madame de Lancy and her mother retired to a convent, after the fashion of bereaved ladies of rank in those days. M. de Genlis, however, who had already been smitten with the charms of the young lady, followed her into the cloister, and made proposals for her hand which were accepted. He was a Count; he was endowed with a fair share of worldly means and also of brains; Madame de Lancy thought she could not do better than take him. The girl changed her name for the third time in her short life, and very soon we find her as Madame de Genlis—the name by which she is known to fame.

It may be as well to state here that future years justified the young lady's extreme sagacity in her choice of a husband. He was a cheerful, witty companion, he was gifted with a large fund of genuine kind-heartedness, and above all he could, when he pleased, put on a most comfortable and convenient marital blindness with regard to the doings of his charming Madame. The tears which she shed were therefore very likely sincere ones, when the news reached Madame de Genlis, exiled in a foreign land, that her husband had been guillotined in the Reign of Terror.

But to begin now with Madame de Genlis as a bride of seventeen.

Very soon after their marriage, the Comte de Genlis had occasion to leave his young wife, so he deposited her in a convent for a while, which was, it appears, the orthodox receptacle for all women of any station in France in those days when they lost their male protectors. These convents seem, however, to have been by no means dreary abodes of asceticism. The nuns were, to use a modern phrase, "jolly old girls," who were not at all averse to a frolic. The youthful madame appears to have had a very good time among them. At midnight she would steal into the cells, and paint with light fingers the faces of the slumbering nuns, so that when they met for their compline services to chant drowsily their office, they suddenly became broad awake as they stared at each other in the light of the holy tapers; every recluse in the aisle was rouged and patched like court ladies. Instead of scolding the pretty, mischievous bride confided to their care, like a pack of sour old maids, the good-natured nuns first indulged in a hearty laugh, and then went on with their religious exercises. Or when she was tired of practical jokes, the whole convent would be turned upside down to amuse her by a ball, in which the nuns would act as cavaliers, and their pupils, of whom they always had a number, as their fair partners.

At length M. de Genlis returned to claim his bride, and carried her off from the convent.

After that the pair lived several merry, happy years together, during which two daughters were born to them, who do not seem to have been taken much into account in Madame de Genlis' life; they both lived to grow up, and both married.

Madame lived in the full tide of society, now in Paris, now in country houses, at which she was a frequent and favourite guest. She appeared at Court, and received her imprimatur as a beauty, by royal eyes resting with admiration upon her. She flirted a good deal, she danced a good deal, she talked a good deal. French society at that period was, in reality, rotten at the core, as far as any solid goodness and worth was concerned, but still, at the same time, it was a society full of sparkle, and wit, and grace, and was a school well calculated to form a finished woman of the world, and such undeniably Madame de Genlis became, and remained throughout her life. All the while she was in the full blaze of her social successes Madame de Genlis never wasted her time, or starved her mind; she read much, and was always acquiring knowledge; she was no vain, empty-headed fine lady, however much she might have seemed one, viewed superficially by casual spectators.

Two figures, which by their intellectual superiority have stamped themselves upon the picture of that age for all time, rise before us as we gaze upon the changeful panorama of Madame de Genlis' life at this period.

One is a man all bristling with eccentricity, with his face all alight with the lamp of mind. He affects an extreme humility, and yet he is in reality enveloped in a cloak of vanity. He dresses with studied simplicity, and yet whenever he goes abroad he thinks that the eyes of all men are upon him. He wishes to be thought a despiser of wealth and honour, and yet he is not above a smile from princes. He is always putting forth moral maxims, and yet his life is stained with blots of immorality. The other man has the eyes of an angel, but the smile of a fiend. His heart is in those beautiful eyes, but that smile casts contempt upon all things, both human and divine. These are the two philosophers who are striving to cure the sick age, each in his own way; but the age will not be reformed by either Rousseau or Voltaire.

We see Madame de Genlis coming in contact with both of these two master minds, but neither seems to have left a lasting impression upon her; she beholds, and wonders, and admires, as she meets them on the world's stage, and then goes her way.

Madame de Genlis was verging towards middle age, when her connection with the Orleans family first began. She entered the Palais Royal as a lady-in-waiting to the Duchesse de Chartres, and soon grew high in favour with the Duke and Duchess. She held very clear and strong views about education, and talked much about them, until the Duchess declared that if ever she had any children, Madame de Genlis should be the woman who should bring them up.

Therefore when a little princess was born to the Orleans branch of the royal line, she was at once appointed as her governess. Other young Orleans princes and princesses followed, and they were all put under Madame de Genlis' care and tuition. The Duke doubtless was extremely fond of talking to the governess, and slipped into the schoolroom at all hours, and lingered with her often in the corridors; but Madame de Genlis played her cards so well, and was so cautious in all her proceedings with regard to the Duke, that for many years the Duchess loved and trusted her without a shadow of suspicion and jealousy, and even the palace servants, prepossessed by her gracious manners, would speak no word of ill of her.

After she had lived in the Palais Royal for some years, Madame de Genlis left the immediate personal household of the Duchess, and was established in a separate house with the royal children. She devoted herself to their education with heart and mind. Her knowledge was wonderfully versatile, and she understood how to impart it with ease to other and younger minds; in short, she was a born schoolmistress. At this period she published several books on education, which were much read and admired.

One day a little English girl was introduced into the schoolroom of the royal Orleans children. Madame de Genlis said that she was born in Newfoundland, that she was an orphan, and that she had been brought up in England, so that she could speak no word of French. Her ostensible *raison d'être* in the Orleans household was that she should teach the royal children English. Madame de Genlis said that her name was Nancy Syms, but she chose to call her by the pretty, romantic name of Pamela.

From that time forward till her marriage, Pamela always remained at Madame de Genlis' side. She grew up an extremely pretty girl, gentle in manner, and modest and retiring in her ways. There was one fact about her which struck everybody who beheld her, and this was that she was strikingly like Madame de Genlis. People, no doubt, shook their heads, and whispered and smiled significantly when they spoke of the connection between Madame de Genlis and Pamela; but Madame persisted in calling her a friendless orphan, whom she had adopted for charity, though she treated her with the most tender affection. At the time of Pamela's marriage with Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the fact of her birth in Newfoundland, and the names of her parents, were very circumstantially set forth in black and white in a register, but there exists a letter, written by Pamela's husband, which clearly acknowledges her relationship to Madame de Genlis and the Duke of Orleans.

The confidential relations between the Duchess of Orleans and Madame de Genlis were disturbed after the lapse of some years. It was hardly possible that it could be otherwise; but the Duke of Orleans, Egalité as he was called in those days, probably retained a tender remembrance of her till his head fell on the scaffold. When

the revolution broke out in earnest, Madame de Genlis was sent to England by the Duke, having one of the young Orleans princesses still under her care. In England she remained some time, much courted among all the most intellectual men and women of English society. She stayed with Burke; she was on intimate terms with Fanny Burney; she bewitched Sheridan, until, according to her own account, he was so taken captive with the charms of herself and Pamela, that he made an offer for the latter's hand. This fact, however, Sheridan always denied. It is nevertheless certain that he was always philandering around two pretty Frenchwomen all the time they remained in England, and that they stayed for a month under his roof.

At length Madame de Genlis returned to Paris, where she appears to have renewed cordial relations with her husband. The amicable and comfortable terms on which she and Pamela and M. de Genlis seem to have lived at this period, strikes us as strange, to say the least of it, but it is in accordance with the times in France. It was at the theatre in Paris that Lord Edward Fitzgerald first saw Pamela and fell in love with her. Madame de Genlis and Pamela left Paris for Tournay; the young English nobleman followed them there, made Pamela a formal declaration, which was accepted, and the pair were very quickly married.

After that the life of Madame de Genlis was somewhat a lonely one. Pamela was living in her English home; her youngest royal pupil was grown up and had drifted away from her; very soon she received the news in Belgium, where she was then living, of the deaths by the guillotine of both the Duke of Orleans and M. de Genlis. She was alone, she was growing old, she was without money, for her fortune had all disappeared in the revolution; but she stood up bravely against sorrow and misfortune, and set herself to gain her own living, and to make fresh friends. Her brilliant and versatile talents now stood her in good stead, and she wrote many books that paid well; she also earned money by her pencil and her needle.

We catch glimpses of Madame de Genlis throughout her latter years residing in different cities of Europe, always cheerful, always at work, always sparkling with wit; filling up any leisure she had with music and conversation, in which she was all her life a mistress. Napoleon acknowledged her genius and gave her a small pension. Her love of young people endured to the last, and she adopted and brought up a boy when she was an old woman. She died at the ripe old age of eighty-eight, with all her faculties and intellects unimpaired, leaving a striking picture in the portrait gallery of celebrated women.

ALICE KING.

THE THREE CIGARETTES.

"WELL, Reggie, I must be off," said Major Oldham, rising from the breakfast table, and addressing his nephew "I shall return in time for dinner. Make yourself at home, in the meanwhile. By-the-bye, you will find plenty of tobacco in my pedestal writing-table. Here's the key."

When his uncle had gone, Reggie finished breakfast at his ease, and then went, key in hand, to search for a cigarette. On opening the top drawers of the pedestal writing-table, he found therein cigars of all sorts and sizes, pipes, tins of tobacco, coarse-cut, fine-cut, Cavendish, Latakia, Turkish, bird's-eye, and so on. But never a cigarette came in sight.

"Just like my luck!" he growled, "and those Bond Street wretches have not yet sent me the box of Egyptians which I ordered. Don't want cigars and pipes first thing in the morning! What am I to do? I'll have another look."

He applied the key to some of the lower drawers, which he drew out and overturned, in search of what he wanted; but still without success. At the bottom of the last drawer, however, he came upon a small paper packet containing three cigarettes. The packet was old and discoloured. The cigarettes, it was clear, had never been rolled by a skilled hand, or by machinery. But the tobacco was there, and that was the principal matter. He put one of the cigarettes in his mouth and lit it. Then, blowing a long puff of smoke through his nostrils, he obtained a sample of its quality.

The tobacco pleased him. It was old, but good. It possessed a curious aromatic flavour, which in a short time grew more pleasant to the palate. Before he had finished the cigarette, Reggie admitted to himself that he had seldom or never tasted anything of the kind that pleased him better. Having placed the remaining couple of cigarettes in his pocket, he locked the drawers of the writing-table again, and went out to consult the deer-stalker about his occupations for the day.

Major Oldham's Highland shooting-box stood in a beautiful valley amid the moors. Reggie was the old soldier's favourite nephew, and, as the Major possessed a large fortune, which he made no great attempt to get through, Reggie was said by every one to have—as the phrase goes—"great expectations." The young man was conscious of the delicate position he held. He was a poor subaltern in a marching regiment, and with little prospect of rising to eminence in his profession; while the vista of many years of debt and difficulty before him was not very encouraging. His uncle, however, had hinted at leaving him the greater part of his wealth; and Reggie was,

therefore, very careful at all times to adapt himself to every wish and way of the old soldier, and to give him no cause for offence or dislike.

The Major was a man of peculiar temperament, but on the whole good-natured. Perhaps his worst fault was a tendency to fly into extremes whenever anything aroused him. But, even then it was not certain that he would fly to the wrong extreme. He would sometimes flagellate himself, so to speak, about some trifling mistake he had made. At other times, when it seemed most likely that he would storm and rage at some *contretemps*, he was content, to the surprise of everybody, to take no more notice of damage done than of a dropped halfpenny. On the whole, Reggie felt that it would take a great deal to alienate his uncle's affections. Nevertheless he was determined to allow no occasion to arise for unpleasantness between them.

The Major returned home just in time to dress for dinner. There being no other guests in the house, the uncle and nephew were alone. They conversed, during the meal, about the principal events of the day; the Major related how the county magistrates had done this, that, and the other; Reggie, how he had brought down a stag which he had experienced great difficulty in stalking. When dessert was on the table, and the Major's long cigars were brought out, Reggie said:

"You promised the other day to tell me a story of your adventures in Morocco; but something has always happened to prevent you from giving me the treat. Such a good opportunity as this may never occur again."

Major Oldham took a long pull at his cigar, and poured forth the smoke meditatively from his lips. "You shall hear it now by all means," he replied.

They settled themselves in armchairs, on either side of the fireplace, and so, under the most favourable conditions for story-telling, the one proceeded to relate and the other to listen.

* * * * *

When I was a young man—just about your age, Reggie—I was possessed of an overwhelming passion for adventure, and this peculiarity was greatly stimulated by the zest of my bosom friend, Dicky Blount, for each new undertaking that I conceived. Probably he was influenced rather by a desire for excitement than by affection for me. But, wheresoever I went, Dicky Blount was sure to go; and taking all things into consideration, we knocked along very happily together.

No two men alive, however, could have differed more completely than we did, in one respect. Dicky cared not a button for the fair sex, while I—well, the flutter of a petticoat would have made me go through fire and water, in the hope of finding that the garment belonged to a good figure or a fair face. As a result of this divergence of interests my love of adventure led me constantly into the most

hazardous scrapes; while Dicky's ditto was perpetually turned to account in extricating me.

We were almost the first Englishmen to penetrate for any considerable distance into the interior of Morocco. During our journeyings we were told by our Arab guide, Mommi, who had heard the tale from a villager, that a neighbouring sheik, or chief, had run away with the daughter of a Christian merchant residing at Tangier. The parents of the girl, a beautiful child of fifteen years of age, had almost gone mad with grief at her loss; and, so well had the sheik's secret been kept from the parents that they entirely failed to learn what became of her.

Here was news indeed! No knight-errant ever determined more readily than I did to succour a maiden in distress, and dear old Dicky was never more willing than now to come and see me through a difficulty. We believed that we could rely implicitly on Mommi, if we promised him a sufficiently large sum of money as a reward for faithfulness.

We accordingly presented ourselves, with our credentials, to the wicked abductor of Zara, the merchant's daughter.

The sheik received us cordially enough, little suspecting the object of our visit. Though our conduct was not particularly straightforward, we considered ourselves justified by the exigencies of the case. Besides, "all is fair in love and war."

Mommi soon saw his way to communicating with the captive Zara. The go-between was an old hag who acted as companion and guardian to Zara, and to whom Mommi falsely and shamelessly made love! His instructions were to learn from Zara whether she was prepared to entrust herself to our care, and to fly with us to the coast in order to rejoin her parents. To my intense delight she sent an answer in the affirmative. There was nothing more to be done but to arrange for her escape the same night. The old hag's assistance was bought with a silver bracelet.

Suffice it to say, we succeeded beyond our expectations. With the old woman's assistance the brave girl let herself down by a rope from her window. In a moment more I held her in my arms as she sat before me on the saddle, and the fleetest horse in all Morocco shot away with us towards the north. Dicky and Mommi, also well mounted, were in close attendance.

Before the dawn arrived, and the wicked old sheik discovered his loss, we were a good thirty miles away, and safe from pursuit in the hills.

How shall I describe the mad ecstasy of falling in love under such romantic conditions? Zara was young, beautiful, and sweet-tempered; she loved me in return. How could she do otherwise than show her gratitude to her deliverer? Never was such happiness as ours!

All was happy as a marriage bell, as I thought. But Mommi would always be calling on us to spur forward; while Dicky Blount would

shake his head again and again, and declare that we were not yet "out of the wood."

The long, tedious, and hurried journey began to tell at last upon little Zara. True, she never uttered a word of complaint; but I could feel that her soft arms hung more heavily round my neck, and that her courage was gradually giving way under the strain.

After more than a week, during which time we had experienced the average difficulty in avoiding Bedouins and in obtaining proper food and shelter in one Arab village and another, we approached the districts bordering on the coast, and felt that in a few hours more we should be safe from the wandering tribes who were the only enemies from whom serious danger need be feared.

Alas! we began to congratulate ourselves too soon.

One evening, as we ascended by a magnificent gorge in the mountains beyond which we could feel sure of safety, we found ourselves confronted by a small troop of mounted Arabs. They were armed to the teeth, though without firearms. It was evident that they intended to block our way. Our first thought, that of prudence, was to retire with as little loss of dignity as possible. But, to our dismay, we found that another and a larger company of threatening enemies had followed us, and cut off our rear. Mommi declared at once that they meant mischief, and observed that, unlike the troop in front of us, the Arabs in the rear carried muskets.

As usual, it was Dicky Blount's business to get us out of this dilemma. He decided instantly. Calling to me to place Zara behind me on the saddle (both for her safety and to enable me to use my weapons if necessary), he called on Mommi to charge and force the enemy in front to take to their heels. Luckily for us, Mommi valued our prospective gratitude higher than his countrymen's possible vengeance, and he charged like a hero.

A short and desperate contest was the result. Fortunately we carried firearms, while the handful of Arabs before us depended on their steel alone.

The victory was in our favour. Two or three well aimed shots disabled some of the Bedouin troop and we dashed through the remainder at full gallop.

At this moment, the Bedouins in the rear, seeing that we were better mounted than they, and that they had not the least chance of overtaking us, discharged their muskets at our retreating figures. A low cry from Zara seemed to tell me of the fear she felt of the bullets that whistled by. I passed my arm gently around her and lifted her in front of me.

We were soon out of danger. Another mile down the slope of the mountains brought us to the open plain beyond. And here Dick and Mommi, who were in advance, drew rein to see how we fared.

A cry from the former warned me, for the first time, that something was wrong with Zara. Her long white veil, which fell over her

shoulders, was stained with blood. A horrible dread grew upon me, that all our efforts had been in vain.

Coming to a deserted mud hut, we dismounted and carried her within. We laid her down and I looked in despair into her face for some sign of hope. There was none. Once only she opened her eyes and smiled to me. Once only she moved her lips aud muttered my name—adding "Beloved!" in Arabic.

She never spoke again.

In the dim twilight of evening, the beautiful black eyes closed for ever, and the gentle heart ceased to beat. As for me, I felt stunned.

Dicky Blount and Mommi watched all night in fear of a surprise. However, no one disturbed us. Zara lay pale and beautiful—as if asleep!

In the grey light of morning we dug a grave in the sand, and laid her in it. Only a little pile of stones marked the spot where the poor child was buried.

* * * * *

The rest may be told in Reggie's own words.

* * * * *

My uncle ceased speaking. For a minute he buried his face in his hands. When he rose, his eyes were wet, and his lips pressed hard together. I could say nothing.

Presently he came to himself and poured out another glass of wine.

"I forgot to say," he remarked, "that as I laid her down on the floor of the mud hut, a little packet containing three cigarettes dropped from the folds of her dress. These are all the souvenir I possess of little Zara. Three cigarettes—which gold and jewels could not buy from me. I will show them to you to-morrow. They are in a drawer of my writing-table—— Good Heavens! lad—what is the matter?" Seeing that something was wrong with me, he characteristically forgot his own sad thoughts.

I told him what the reader has already guessed. In my ignorance, that morning, I had taken the three cigarettes—and they were now in ashes. I could have shot myself! It seemed horrible to have to give him such pain. The words of regret poured from my lips.

My uncle raised his hand and stopped me. I could see that he ruthlessly thrust his own sensitiveness into the background. For some minutes he seemed buried in profound thought. The glitter that first came in his eyes faded into a softer look of sympathy with my distress.

"Well, well," he said, "all things come to an end. I shall soon be gone myself, and Zara will none the less live in my memory."

It was so like him. He had forgiven me!

GEORGE FOSBERY.

ALL SAINTS' DAY.

As cities on a hill, as lights divine,
The Saints dwell here below;
O God, Thou givest them as stars to shine
Upon a world of woe:
That we who faint and falter 'neath the load
Of daily grief and care,
Might take new courage, seeing on our road
Those shining lights and fair.

And yet what portion have we with Thy Saints,
Who play so brave a part,
We who but vex the air with idle plaints,
And shrink from every smart:
We with our wavering wills, our fears, our sin,
What lot have we with them,
Who even here do seem to dwell within
The New Jerusalem?

They walk above the surging tides of ill
And keep their raiment white;
In purpose and fulfilment, heart and will,
For ever in Thy sight.
In honour or dishonour, joy or woe,
Content to ask no choice,
As poor yet making many rich, they go,
And sorrowing rejoice.

Lowly and yet exalted, patient, brave,
With what they own sufficed;
If rich, then finding Christ in all they have—
If poor, then all in Christ.
Defeated yet not conquered, overthrown,
Yet victors in the strife,
Living to glorify Thy Name alone,
And, dying, entering Life.

O God of Saints! look down on us Thy sons,
Our fears and failures see;
Conform us unto these Thy holy ones,
And more than all to Thee.
Give us the tireless heart that fails nor faints,
And when this life is o'er,
Grant us, O Lord, a portion with Thy Saints,
In glory evermore!

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

"SOME DAY YOU WILL COME TO ME, AND SAY: 'HOW MUCH I LIKE HIS DRY WAYS!'"

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1893.

MR. WARRENNE:

MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

CHAPTER XL.

LOVE AND ABUSE.

LADIES seldom make their appearance very early after a ball. In town the hours are all arranged to suit each other; but in the country, where people insist on breakfasting at their usual time, it is inconvenient to sit up all night. Mr. Reynolds thought he did a great deal in adjourning breakfast to ten o'clock, at which hour precisely he came down, starched as usual, and greeted Mr. Courtenay, who was always an early riser.

"Mrs. Reynolds will not appear," he said, beginning grimly to make the tea; "she is very much fatigued with her evening, and intends taking her breakfast in her room. As to Florence, I conclude that we shall see her every minute."

"No doubt," said Mr. Courtenay; "unless she is tired also."

"I imagine there must be something fatiguing in dancing," said Mr. Reynolds, gravely buttering his dry toast.

Certainly he had never tried.

"I should not wonder," said Mr. Courtenay. "I only know it does not tire me."

"I have always deprecated these pleasures," said Mr. Reynolds; "they are at once absurd and injurious. What benefit does a young woman derive from running about a room all night, and finding herself unfit to fulfil her duties in the morning? It is now half-past ten."

"Very true!" said Mr. Courtenay.

Breakfast went on in silence—the gentlemen then looked over the papers—a few remarks passed on the subject of the railways. Soon a carriage was heard to drive to the door.

"I rather think that is my solicitor," said Mr. Reynolds rising from table; "I have some business of my own to transact before I come to yours."

Courtenay bowed, and Mr. Reynolds went to his study.

Soon after Florence came down, looking so much paler, so much older indeed, so terribly ill, that a common acquaintance would hardly have recognised her.

"Let me ring for some hot coffee," said Mr. Courtenay; "everything is cold here."

"So I suppose," said Florence languidly; "I know I'm late."

"Very natural!" said Courtenay, going up to the table; "what shall I do for you?"

"Oh! nothing at present; I'll only take some coffee," said Florence. "What a horrid rainy day it seems. Where's Mrs. Reynolds?"

"She does not show—she is wiser than you, Miss Reynolds—she keeps close till she has recovered her fatigue."

"I look dreadful! don't I?" said Florence, coming languidly to the table. "Whose carriage was that I heard just now?"

"Mr. Young's," replied Courtenay.

Florence paused, with her hand on the back of the chair she was advancing to the table.

"Mr. Young arrived!" she faltered.

"Yes; didn't you tell me he was coming to-day?"

"But so soon," said Florence.

"A few hours sooner or later, what does it matter?" replied Courtenay.

"Very true!" replied Florence, taking her seat with a dejected air.

"Oh! as you are so soon to become relations, I may show you this note I received from Ada just before breakfast. She is engaged to be married to Sir Frederic Manning—they have been quick about it, for last night she was rather put out that Sir Frederic didn't——"

Florence was sitting like a waxen image; she seemed neither to see nor hear.

"Are you ill, Miss Reynolds?" he asked stopping short in his relation.

"No; give me the note," she whispered.

She took it. Ada wrote in the highest spirits.

"As I bored you so with my fancies last night," she said, "I can't do less than give you the earliest news of my engagement. Sir Frederic came this morning—actually before we had breakfasted—and papa, finding that my heart was set upon it, gave his consent at once. Sir Frederic promises to be very good in future; and as for his difficulties, why we can set them to rights. It is so easy, where only money is concerned. By the way, mamma made me laugh excessively at breakfast, by declaring that everybody fancied me engaged to Mr. Warrenne-Digby. The very nicest person in the world, whom I

like extremely; but you know, Charles, how very far my thoughts have been from him, though he does waltz to perfection.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ADA."

The note dropped from her trembling fingers.

"Well; are you surprised?" said Courtenay, picking it up.

Florence tried to speak, but she burst into tears.

Certainly, thought Mr. Courtenay, leaning back in his chair, I have no genius for these affairs; I don't understand them. What is she crying about, I wonder? She refused Sir Frederic, and now she wants him back again. Ah, that is it!

"I really wish I could offer to be of some assistance to you," he said; "but in a case like this it is utterly impossible—he is lost to you for ever."

To his infinite surprise she slid from her chair on her knees, just before him, in an agony of tears. What now? he thought to himself; but he did not make any inquiries. He merely attempted to raise her; she resisted him.

"For Heaven's sake!" she said, "let me appeal to your compassion once more. I was mad last night; in my distress I begged you to let our engagement proceed. Break it! break it! things can be no worse; I can suffer no more, whatever may be my father's displeasure! Go to him, Mr. Courtenay, go at once! Tell him that at last I have asserted my own will! That I will not marry!"

"Presently," said Mr. Courtenay, succeeding at last in lifting her upon the sofa, and taking his seat beside her.

"My aunt Creswick will receive me," said Florence; "I think she will; I have in this committed no crime; I have allowed myself to be frightened at a shadow; after all, what is it that my father will withdraw from me? Not his love, not his esteem—I never had them—merely his protection; well, I will learn to support myself."

"But this time your decision must be final," said Mr. Courtenay.

"It is," said Florence.

"Well, then," said Courtenay, "I first going to Forrel Court to settle a little business of my own, and then I must proceed to Erlsmede, for Ada will want to talk over her match with me, and then I will bring Mrs. Creswick back with me; for in case there should be anything of a row, you will be glad to have her on the spot. And after dinner I will explain to Mr. Reynolds how we stand."

"Oh, thank you! You have indeed been very kind throughout!"

"You will give me a character then," said Mr. Courtenay, taking up his hat, "if I should feel disposed to enter the service of another lady? *Au revoir.*"

It was still raining hard; Courtenay ordered his horse, and galloped immediately to Forrel Court.

As he entered the library, Maud turned hastily from the casement

and came to the table where she had been drawing in water-colours.

"You were looking out of the window," said Courtenay.

"I was," returned Maud; "I have read till I am tired, painted till I am tired, and I am idle to-day. I was actually watching the rain as if that would do any good."

Then suddenly recollecting that he had ridden through it, she said:

"I should not wonder if you were wet."

"No, I had a mackintosh; not that you would mind if I were."

"I mind the weather though," said Maud, seating herself at her drawing-frame, "it makes me feel so dull. They shouldn't have let you in; papa and Leonard have driven over to Erlsmede this morning, to see Karl; but I suppose the rain made them compassionate."

"I meant to come in at any rate," said Courtenay. "I'm come for my gardenia."

"*Plâit-il?*" said Maud, looking up.

"I left it on the mantelpiece in the ball-room," said Courtenay.

"Mr. Courtenay," said Maud, "if the servants had found *you* on the mantelpiece, it is possible they might have taken care of you; but I'm afraid there is no chance for your gardenia. However, if you wish it, I'll ring and inquire."

"No; let us talk," said Courtenay.

"To be sure," said Maud, leaning over her sketch and painting very busily. "How did you like the ball?"

"Not so much as I expected," said Courtenay. "I danced but once with you; you were always engaged."

"How are they all at Heathfield?" asked Maud.

"Oh, we have had a scene this morning," said Courtenay. "Miss Reynolds has discarded me; don't you pity me?"

"What have you been doing?" exclaimed Maud, holding her brush suspended.

"Nothing—I give you my word; she finds I am not to her taste."

"Well, that can't be wondered at!" said Maud, turning round and searching among her colours.

"Are you in earnest?" said Courtenay.

Maud made no answer; she went on turning over her paints.

"For some time past we have understood each other that the affair should proceed no farther," said Courtenay; "but we closed accounts this morning."

"Ah, indeed!" said Maud, who did not like to appear too much interested by his news.

"Well, Miss Warrenne, what do you think of it?" asked Courtenay, drawing his chair to her side, and looking over her sketch.

"Think of it, Mr. Courtenay? what a question!" replied Maud, half laughing.

"Well?" said Courtenay.

"Why, I think this—that a great deal is now cleared up which seemed mysterious in you, and a great deal still left in obscurity; which is one element of the sublime, you know."

And then she dashed a great dark mass of shadow half across her sky.

"I wish you would leave off painting and talk to me!" said Courtenay.

Maud laid down her brush, turned her chair a little way round, clasped her hands in her lap, and gave him a look from her great sparkling grey eyes, half comic, half amazed.

"Well, Mr. Courtenay, it is for you to begin," she said.

"There is no weather that could long make you dull," he exclaimed, fascinated by her manner.

"Very well," replied Maud; "now shall I go on painting, if you please?"

"What do you think of me? tell me frankly," said Mr. Courtenay, looking earnestly at her.

"Well, then; I *will* tell you, Mr. Courtenay—in reference to this affair, of course."

He made a sign of assent.

"It always appeared to me," said Maud, "that you had no attachment to Miss Reynolds. You will tell me that it was not your way to attach yourself to any one; very likely you can't help that; but when you think for a moment to what people pledge themselves when they marry—good Heavens! with indifference, perhaps even contempt at your heart—to take those vows! You have had a very narrow escape!"

"I have; I feel it," said Courtenay. "I looked down upon Miss Reynolds, yet in this affair she was more conscientious than I—that is not a thing to be forgotten."

"Miss Reynolds appears to be very much improved," said Maud, wishing to say something, and feeling more and more embarrassed that Mr. Courtenay chose to confide his private affairs to her.

"Not my way to attach myself to any one," said Courtenay, after a silence of some minutes, during which he had been turning about her pencils and brushes in an abstracted manner; "why the impression you made on me when a child has never been effaced! You have been the plague of my life for the last two years—ever since I met you at the Creswicks'! You drove me to offer myself to a woman I did not care for—I love you. I know you are not engaged. That is enough—you shall not escape me again. We will settle the rest at our leisure!"

"I hate you with my whole heart!" exclaimed Maud, bursting suddenly into tears, and disengaging her hand with some difficulty from his. "You are always rude! You don't know how to behave to a woman! You have no business to talk to me as if I had no

voice in the matter—you treat me very ill—and I hope with all my might I may never see you again!"

Here she dried her eyes hastily, and walked to the window.

"If you mean every word of that," said Courtenay, following her, "if you thoroughly hate me, let us say 'good-bye' to each other. I will never come into your presence again. If I cannot obtain your regard, if you do not understand the love I bear you, I will do without it—let us part at once!"

He held out his hand.

"You are the proudest, most obstinate, disagreeable creature I ever saw!" said Maud, with a sob in her voice; "I don't want you to go away altogether; I am used to your company—you know I should miss it, and that makes you so ill-natured!"

"Oh, I don't mind your abusing me," said Courtenay, taking her hand, "that's a matter of course!"

"You never said a thing to me," continued Maud, wiping her eyes at intervals, and still leaning her head against the window, "that might lead me to think you liked me; we always quarrelled—that was amusing—but you never expressed your feelings; and now you talk as if I could not comprehend a loyal attachment—as if I were a wretch!"

"Oh, I think you a wretch!" said Courtenay, drawing still nearer to her, "that is the reason I wish to marry you as soon as possible."

"Talking so roughly about marrying," said Maud, colouring over neck and brow, "and never having said one civil thing to me since I first saw you!"

"Never having made a catalogue, like little Red Riding Hood, of your features," said Courtenay smiling. "'What fine eyes you have got, grandmamma! What fine teeth you have got, grandmamma!' I thought you knew all that, without my telling you. Beside, you don't give me much time; for until this morning I have not been quite at liberty to express the admiration I really feel for you."

"And if you did care for me, how shockingly you have behaved," said Maud.

"I have."

"It would have been bad enough if you had not cared for Miss Reynolds; but when you cared all the time for some one else—"

"Worse and worse," said Courtenay.

"And I don't believe you are really feeling sorry for what you have done."

"Not at this particular moment," he replied.

"And again, if you have the least idea that I ever intend to leave papa, you are quite mistaken," said Maud, her eyes filling fast with tears.

"You shall do as you like; we will stay with your father, and he shall stay with us: that is easily settled."

"Us!" exclaimed Maud.

"You and me," replied Mr. Courtenay, quietly.

"I wish you would go," said Maud, still looking steadily out of the window, and finding some difficulty in keeping back her tears; "you ought not to have been admitted. I wish you would go."

"So I will directly," said Mr. Courtenay, without offering any lover-like opposition to the request; "I have plenty to do; I expect we shall have a great row this evening with old Reynolds."

"What! Does he not know yet?" asked Maud, turning round eagerly.

"Not he; the lawyer has just arrived to make the settlements."

"How curious! I wonder how the explanation will go off," exclaimed Maud.

"As I have every intention of coming over here to-morrow," said Courtenay, "I shall then be able to tell you."

"It is a great price to pay for one's news," said Maud, "that you should be the bearer of them."

"Ah, you can't help yourself! I won't take a denial," said Courtenay; "but as you have such fine eyes, let me recommend that you don't spoil them with crying."

"I was not crying!" said Maud, indignantly.

"I thought you were," said Courtenay, venturing to touch her wet cheek with his lips; "good-morning."

CHAPTER XLI.

TOO LATE.

"WHAT on earth could Courtenay have to say to my father?" said Leonard, coming in almost as soon as Mr. Courtenay had left the room; "he met us just as we drove up to the door, and begged 'to have a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Warrenne.'"

"Why, you see, Leonard, that he is such a very odd person, this Mr. Courtenay," said Maud, looking rather confused; "he took it into his head—he came here to say—he's so foolish—that man!"

Maud walked quickly to the window and back again.

"Why, what had he to say then?" said Leonard, smiling.

"Oh, he has been so stupid, he has managed so badly, that his engagement with Miss Reynolds is entirely broken off," said Maud, as carelessly as she could.

"Off! You don't mean it?" exclaimed Leonard, rushing towards her.

"I do, indeed; very clumsy he must have been," said Maud, smiling.

"But, my dear—broken—so very near! Oh, Maud, you are dreaming—quite—utterly broken off?"

"Utterly, I should hope," said Maud, "since he has had the assurance to—make the agreeable to me."

Leonard caught his sister in his arms—then rushed to the bell.

"My horse, directly!" he exclaimed, as the servant appeared.

"Where *are* you going?" asked Maud.

"To Heathfield," he said; and left the room as he spoke.

"Oh, I see! how blind I have been all this time," said Maud, looking after him as he galloped from the door; "and the grandfather was right, after all. How provoking!"

Florence went to sit with Mrs. Reynolds in her boudoir, after her agitating conversation with Courtenay.

Mrs. Reynolds, in her delicate white dressing-gown, was half lying on a sofa, engaged upon some pretty little frivolous bit of needle-work.

"Well, Florence, dear," she said, looking up, "I'm half-dead. How are you?"

"Not very well," replied Florence. "In fact, I never felt so ill in my life. I have a singular oppression here," touching her heart.

"I think you want a little change," said Mrs. Reynolds; "if you were not so very soon to be married, I think I would ask papa to take us to Brighton or Leamington. Have you settled where you are to go for your wedding tour?"

"No," said Florence. "Do you think," she added, with some hesitation, "papa would take it so very much amiss, if I were to determine to remain single?"

"Oh, my dear, don't breathe a word of such a thing. Papa is so doatingly fond of Mr. Courtenay, and he really is such a delightful man! When his father dies he will have a beautiful estate. I'm sure, if I were single, I would not hesitate a moment; think what a duty it is, my dear Florence, to settle well!"

Here Mrs. Reynolds' maid came in to say that Mr. Warrenne-Digby was in the drawing-room and desired to see Mrs. Reynolds.

"To see me? In this *peignoir*—I can't go down; dearest Florence, just go down and see him for me. Tell him his ball was divine, and that I was in ecstasies the whole evening; and say that I thought his waistcoat in such good taste. And that Maud looked most beautiful and broke no end of hearts; and—oh! ask him the name of the man who played the harp; I should not wonder if he could give me a few lessons; he had a very fine finger."

It was impossible for Florence to refuse, however reluctant she felt to fulfil this mission; she descended the staircase with a beating heart. Leonard rose hastily and bowed, as she entered; they had not shaken hands since—oh, ages ago.

Although she had, as Sir Frederic said, lost very much of that brilliancy of complexion which the finest painting could not have rivalled, the beauty of her features and the singular grace of her movements would always render her conspicuous. She seemed to him as beautiful as ever.

"Mrs. Reynolds has not yet left her room, Mr. Warrenne-Digby,"

said Florence, taking her seat; "she is easily fatigued, even when she is most amused, so she has sent me to say a thousand things on her part to you about your charming ball."

"It was you I wish to see," replied Leonard, in a trembling voice. "I asked for Mrs. Reynolds that she might procure me the privilege of saying a few words to you alone."

Her heart seemed to contract, as if she could neither breathe nor speak. He felt as he used to do, when a glance from her had the power to make him change colour.

"I am occupied with but one thought at this moment," he said; "it is that you are free."

Florence turned pale as death.

"If the past were impressed on your heart, as it is on mine," he continued, "as the first great sorrow I ever endured, I might ask you if you remembered that I once pledged myself to offer you all the aid in my power, if you should ever need the help of a brother."

Florence covered her face with her hands.

"At that time," said Leonard, "such an offer must have appeared to you presumptuous, at least, absurd—for I was utterly without resources, and in a condition of life that—that hardly excused even the desire I felt to serve you."

Florence could not speak—her tears fell through her fingers.

"Yet, even then," he said, "my devotion hardly merited to be repulsed with so much scorn—a love so hopeless is bitter enough in itself—and mine was hopeless, though you can never tell how true!"

Her head sank on the arm of the chair; her face still hidden by her hands.

"Do not think that in alluding to the past, I mean to reproach you with your scorn—I would only recall to you that I then placed my future life and means at your disposal. And I may be permitted to look back with some pride upon my attachment, since it has survived even your contempt—the sternest test, believe me, to which you can put a lover's constancy."

Her emotion shook her from head to foot, but she could find no words.

"Florence!" exclaimed Leonard, approaching nearer and taking her hand, "you are changed since then—a little changed—you are not quite so proud—you will not answer me with disdain, however you may decide! you are not happy; they do not understand you here—your father is even harsh to you. Ah! you do not know how I have felt all that has happened to you since we parted; well, I offer you a home—I will make you happy in it—trust at last to me! In time you will return my love."

"Don't, you kill me!" sobbed Florence, convulsed with agitation—"too generous! I was never worthy of you; but now, when I have lost the beauty that made me vain, even the riches that drew around me so many flatterers——"

"Nay, riches!" said Leonard, reproachfully.

"I love you too well to accept you," she continued. "I don't know when I first began to love you. I would have given anything to recall that scene when I spoke so abominably! I was mad, I think!"

Leonard, falling on to his knees, covered her hands with kisses.

"Come, sit here," said Florence. "I could die of shame to see you kneeling to *me*."

"You love me—then you accept me?" said Leonard, before he rose.

"I do—I will," said Florence. "Yet, oh, Leonard, I feel as if I should never live to marry any one. A strange weight, a strange presentiment oppresses me. Something whispers to me that my hours are numbered. The misery I have endured has been too much for me; it has killed me. Twice since last night I have fainted, and the last time my maid was really alarmed."

She placed her hand to her heart as she spoke; it was beating rapidly, violently; there was a strange blueness about her lips. Leonard also felt alarmed as he looked at her, but the thought that she was nervous and overwrought calmed him. It would pass away.

"And I think—if I died"—panted Florence, "it were better so. My life has been a terrible mistake, but I am truly penitent. No one would miss me or mourn me; no one but—you, Leonard."

She drooped her head on his shoulder, and his arms clasped around her. For a moment, with her eyes closed, so quiet and still was she that the beating of her heart was both visible and audible. She looked almost like death itself.

"My darling," he murmured, "this will pass away, and you will recover health and spirits. The happy always do, and I will make you happy. You have been too much tried; the ordeal has been too great; but it is over. I think that all is well now."

Florence shook her head sadly, and at that moment Mr. Reynolds opened the door, and walked straight into the room.

Florence uttered a cry of terror. Leonard gently placed her head upon the cushion of the sofa and went directly up to him.

"Mr. Reynolds," he said, "I have loved your daughter for several years, long before Mr. Courtenay ever saw her. I learn for the first time to-day that my love is returned; my claim is earlier than his—I entreat you to grant me her hand."

"Mr. Warrenne-Digby," said Mr. Reynolds, "I am flattered and proud that you distinguish my daughter by your regard. Had your application been earlier, I should have been truly happy to have received it favourably—indeed, so highly do I esteem you, that I can hardly tell on which my preference would have fallen—you or my excellent friend, Mr. Courtenay. But my word is given to him, and it would be very injurious to my daughter if, after her former conduct, there were any vacillation now in her proceedings; her last decision

must be irrevocable. I would never pardon her breaking her faith to Mr. Courtenay."

"Papa!" cried Florence, approaching and sinking at his feet, "do not destroy me! I have suffered so much that I can bear no more. Forgive me; I can never marry Mr. Courtenay!"

"It appears to me," said Mr. Reynolds, "that you have a very erroneous opinion of your duty. I came into this room, expecting to find Mr. Courtenay here, that I might have his advice upon the settlements, which Mr. Young is now sketching out in my study. I did not anticipate any scene of this nature. I am perfectly astonished that you hesitate for a moment in the fulfilment of your engagement; but I remind you that I lend no sanction to such duplicity; in another month you would come to implore me to break with Mr. Warrenne-Digby. You had better rise."

She tried mechanically to obey him, but, in doing so, she reeled, and fell heavily to the ground.

Leonard rushed to her, and raised her from the floor.

"Good Heavens! Mr. Reynolds—she is dead!" he cried, observing with a pang of terror, that, instead of the paleness that accompanies a swoon, her forehead was deeply flushed.

"You are mistaken," said Mr. Reynolds, glancing at his daughter, and then crossing to ring the bell. "Florence has fainted—a very common practice with young ladies when they are agitated—the result of a weak habit of indulgence, which is indeed too prevalent in the present day."

Leonard, on his knees beside the sofa on which he had placed Florence, was pressing her cold hand to his lips. He did not seem to heed this explanation.

Louise entered, but not being able to carry her young lady without assistance, Mr. Reynolds, desiring Leonard to await his return, took her up in his arms and bore her to her room.

When he returned, he placed two chairs just opposite to each other (it is singular that all his ways were angular), and assuming one himself, he signed to Leonard to take the other.

"I wish explicitly to state to you," said Mr. Reynolds, "that under any other circumstances I should be deeply gratified by the preference you have shown my daughter. I do not wish you to go away with the idea that I undervalue your character, or that I am not sensible of the very excellent establishment it is in your power to offer to your wife; but you must be aware that Florence has been too much talked of already. Another change would occasion all kinds of surmises. It is my duty to shield her name as long as she remains under my roof; and I beg you to understand it is on this account, and on no other, that I am induced to decline your addresses. Until Florence is married, you will comprehend that it is desirable for both your sakes, that you should not meet; but afterwards, I hope I may be allowed to number you among my most valued guests."

"Pardon me," said Leonard, "I am hardly capable of attending to what you say; I am occupied with but one idea. Will you allow me to ring and inquire how Miss Reynolds is?"

Mr. Reynolds, in reply to this remark, laid his watch down on the table.

"It is now three minutes since I left her," he said, "we must allow a quarter of an hour for these attacks; she will then be as well as ever. I will send to ask after her in that time."

He sat looking grimly at his watch.

"Mr. Reynolds," said Leonard, "I can but hope that your decision is not final—that for a mere feeling of etiquette you will not destroy the happiness of our lives. If you had ever loved, you would feel the cruelty of your present determination."

"Like most young people," said Mr. Reynolds, "you think your present feelings are to last your life; you imagine that you are never to recover from a disappointment; that because your feelings are ardent, they are also indelible. Dreams! dreams!"

He spoke with more softness than was common to him, it seemed as if some recollection crossed his mind.

"My feelings have lasted some years, supported by no hope, no shadow of probability," said Leonard, "it is therefore likely that they will survive your prohibition."

"When I was young," said Mr. Reynolds, "I also loved a lady as much as you loved my daughter. I believe that my love was returned; her father seemed to approve my addresses. At length he died, and left her, a rich heiress if she remained single, a beggar if she accepted my hand."

"I know—I have heard," said Leonard.

"I knew that the generosity of her disposition would prompt her to forego an inheritance for my sake," continued Mr. Reynolds, "but I felt that such a sacrifice was unreasonable for her to make, or for me to claim. I felt that in urging her to follow me to the unhealthy climate where my own prospects led me, I not only demanded her to risk health and life, but to resign opulence and indulgence in her own country. I felt that the time might come when she would regret her decision, and for *her* sake, not my own, I resolved to resign my pursuit of her hand. I was aware that explanations would but render our parting more difficult and painful, I therefore denied myself even a farewell, and left this country, never to see her again. Yet I have lived to wear out this remembrance. You have yet to experience the beneficial effects of time."

"And this man thought he did right," said Leonard to himself; "it is vain to appeal to him."

At this moment Mr. Courtenay and Mrs. Creswick entered the room.

"Oh, Mrs. Creswick," said Leonard, "I am in the greatest anxiety about Miss Reynolds—I fear she is very ill. Let me entreat you to go up and see her."

"I will go at once," said Mrs. Creswick, and she left the room.

Mr. Courtenay then advanced to Mr. Reynolds.

"I must absolutely beg to decline fulfilling my engagement with your daughter, Mr. Reynolds," he said. "She has declared to me her positive repugnance to my addresses. Her heart is entirely occupied by another person. (I should not wonder if it were you, Moonshine, after all.) Under these circumstances, no man of honour can for one moment think of urging his suit. However, then, I may regret that I shall no longer enjoy the advantage of your alliance, I must positively and finally withdraw my claim."

Mr. Courtenay then bowed with an air of decision, and stepped back a pace, as if he said—for all his gestures were expressive—"I back out of the concern altogether!"

"Then, Mr. Warrenne-Digby," said Mr. Reynolds, "as Mr. Courtenay declines marrying my daughter, from honourable, though perhaps rather fastidious motives, I have no longer any reason for withholding my consent from you. I give it you with all my heart—may you be happy together."

As Leonard pressed the hand which Mr. Reynolds extended towards him, Mrs. Creswick appeared on the threshold, pale, calm, and breathless.

"Mr. Reynolds," she said, "I don't quite like my niece's appearance. I should be glad if you would send for Mr. Warrenne. I know he is at Forrel Court, and I am sure he would kindly come."

"Has she not recovered from her swoon?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"She is quite insensible," said Mrs. Creswick, "but she is not fainting, for she breathes; and this it is that alarms me."

"My father is at Forrel!" exclaimed Leonard. "I'll go directly. I'll bring him—I——"

"Sit down," said Courtenay, observing that Leonard's sudden paleness, the more striking in so dark a person, rendered it probable that he would not reach Forrel at all. "That is your horse? I'll ride him over and find Mr. Warrenne."

He was off directly.

"Oh, my forebodings! Oh, my golden dreams!" murmured Leonard, covering his face, and quoting unconsciously the exclamation of old Moor in Schiller's drama.

"Do not alarm yourself," said Mr. Reynolds calmly; "Florence is probably nervous. I will go up and see her myself."

Mr. Warrenne was soon at Heathfield; Mrs. Creswick took him up to Florence. Mrs. Reynolds was seated by the pillow terrified, Mr. Reynolds, with his arms folded, standing at the foot of the bed.

They had undressed her, and she lay breathing as if in a deep sleep, her beautiful hair scattered all over the pillow.

When Mrs. Reynolds saw Mr. Warrenne gravely examining his patient, and particularly feeling her head, as if he suspected that she

had given herself a severe blow in falling, she felt it to be serious and burst into tears. Mr. Reynolds led her from the room.

Mrs. Creswick, always active and self-possessed, lent Mr. Warrenne every assistance in applying the usual remedies. But every attempt to restore her to consciousness proved vain.

"She is in a state of coma," said Mr. Warrenne; "the agitation she has undergone has been too much for her nerves, weakened by previous indisposition. It would be a satisfaction to me if you would send for a physician. But there is dangerous heart-mischief. I fear it can have but one termination."

"And you think——?" questioned Mrs. Creswick earnestly.

"That she will not live twelve hours!" replied Mr. Warrenne.

Leonard, who had begged to be allowed to remain in the house "until Miss Reynolds should be better," for he could not bear to glance at the other alternative, spent his time in pacing up and down the drawing-room for hours; sometimes stopping to lean against the wall from exhaustion, then beginning to walk again. Courtenay, who sincerely pitied him, would not leave him alone; but he was wiser than to rack him with consolations.

It was indeed a hard trial to lose her, just when every difficulty was made smooth, and after so long and hopeless an attachment.

Mr. Reynolds went himself for the physician. He had four horses to his carriage, and he calculated that he should bring him by day-break.

Mrs. Creswick looked despondingly at Mr. Warrenne. She thought it was likely that all would be over by that time.

He consented to stay that night at Heathfield. He said himself that he could be of no further use; that the physician was for the survivors, and not for the patient; but as his presence was a comfort to Mrs. Creswick, he was willing to remain. He tried to persuade his son to go home, but nothing would induce Leonard to stir from the house while she lived. Indeed, with the pertinacity of people in great mental suffering, he could not be made to believe the extent of her danger—he fancied that a favourable change must occur.

Every ten minutes he paused in his hurried walk to beg Mr. Courtenay to go up-stairs and inquire how Miss Reynolds was going on.

Mr. Courtenay never hesitated in going up directly, and came back with exactly the same message—that no favourable change had occurred.

During the early part of the night Florence lay breathing heavily, to all appearance in the same state; but in a few hours her breathing became more faint, her pulse weaker, and now and then there stole across her face and limbs a contraction which told to the experienced eye of Mr. Warrenne that the end was not far off.

Then Mr. Courtenay had to bring back the message that she was gradually sinking.

Leonard's despair was terrible and therefore silent. He seemed crushed when he found that no interval of consciousness was likely to

intervene; that he had spoken to her for the last time; that all the thousand things he had to say and ask must now remain for ever unspoken. Some people never suffer in this way; but those who do grow old under it.

Yet still Mr. Courtenay had hardly brought him news when he entreated him in an accent of despair to go again.

"It is a little like the treadmill," said Courtenay to himself, as he quietly ascended the staircase for about the hundredth time; "but everything has an end; I think I hear the carriage."

Leonard waited for his return, usually so rapid, but no footsteps came; the cold dawn was stealing in across the shutters; at last a lighter step approached; he sank down on a chair with a foreboding at his heart. Mrs. Creswick, her eyes dimmed with tears, came to his side, and laid beside him a long silken ringlet of fair hair.

Florence had just breathed her last.

At that moment the carriage stopped at the door. Mr. Reynolds had brought the physician to see his daughter.

CHAPTER XLII.

MRS. CRESWICK TO THE RESCUE.

PERHAPS it may occur to some persons that when Mr. Reynolds found his daughter was actually dead, there mingled with his natural regrets some shadow of remorse for the harshness with which he had treated her. Not at all, I give you my word. He believed himself to have been the tenderest as well as the most judicious of fathers, and went into an ecstasy of admiration whenever he remembered how he had posted up to London with four horses to fetch the physician, rewarded him with fifty guineas, and sent him back again after breakfast.

Leonard demanded, almost as his right, that he should be the chief mourner at her funeral; he felt that it would be almost a sacrilege were any one to fulfil that duty who had loved her less than himself; and Mr. Reynolds was so far touched by his unfeigned grief, that although he was very much under the influence of what people might say, he acceded to his request. For once his feeling prevailed over his sense of etiquette; he was second at his own daughter's funeral.

Mr. Reynolds then caused a splendid monument of white marble to be erected in Forrel Church, as if (Mr. Courtenay said) he was quite determined that Leonard should never hear the last of it; and, then, having done everything that propriety and affection could dictate, he dismissed the subject from his mind.

On Mrs. Reynolds it had more effect; she was a good deal sobered by the shock. And yet *she* had nothing to reproach herself

with : she had been uniformly kind to Florence ; she had done nothing but stand in her place.

* * * * *

"I suppose, if you are not a cannibal," said Maud, drying her eyes as Courtenay finished giving her an account of the funeral which had just taken place ; "you are glad that you behaved tolerably to poor Miss Reynolds, now that she is dead."

"Not being a cannibal," replied Mr. Courtenay, "I make a point of behaving tolerably to people whether they live or die."

"What will become of poor Leonard I don't know," said Maud ; "he shuts himself up and never speaks a word. Papa can do nothing with him."

"He does very wisely," said Courtenay. "I daresay there is nothing he wishes to make known, and therefore he is silent. The first thing to be decided is, what will become of *us ;* when I have got you to make up your mind upon that subject, I will find out what to do with Leonard."

"You take things so coolly," replied Maud ; "I think I should die happy if I could once see you cry."

"Well, when you are about to die, let me know, and I will try to accommodate you."

"You are a hateful person !" said Maud ; "but still I will own it was kind of you to give Leonard that beautiful miniature of poor Miss Reynolds."

"Yes, it was very liberal, as I did not at all want it myself," replied Courtenay ; "I shall soon replace it directly I get you to town. I shall make you sit to Thorburn."

"I won't live in London !" said Maud.

"Don't," replied Courtenay ; "we will live in Devonshire."

"That's so far from papa," said Maud.

"We will take a house then at Erlsmede."

"I don't like the Erlsmede people," said Maud.

"Depend upon it they are just like all other people," said Courtenay ; "the breed is everywhere the same. When they see you with two or three carriages, and so forth, you will find them the sweetest, most complaisant creatures in the world."

"Many thanks to them," said Maud.

"Well, we need not trouble ourselves to fix on a residence till we have settled when we are likely to be in want of it. Come—what say you ?"

"I suppose you know," said Maud, "that all the neighbours imagine to this day, that you were on the point of marriage with Miss Reynolds ; it would, therefore, not be very decent in you even to think of such things at present. If you could manage to show a little more feeling, it would not disgrace you, when you consider that everybody is pitying poor Mr. Courtenay's sufferings !"

"Come, this won't do," said Mr. Courtenay ; "you and I are so

well matched in our veneration for 'people' that it is of no use to quote what they think in support of your perverseness."

"I will be perverse!" said Maud.

"I daresay you will, you always have been," said Mr. Courtenay; "but I advise you not to provoke me, or I will run off with you to Gretna Green before you know where you are."

"I would soon make you repent it," said Maud.

"Come, since you care so much on a sudden about what everybody says," exclaimed Courtenay, "I will go round to all the neighbours, and tell them the whole history. I will inform them that I would have married you two years ago, but that you were so proud and self-willed, you actually did not know your own mind; and that you can't make it up now, from fear of their sovereign displeasure. I will ask them severally if they don't think it very hard, under all the circumstances, that I should be kept dawdling about any longer, and I will bring back their votes in my hat, together with the day they think proper to fix for my wedding. Won't that do?"

"I'll never speak to you again!" exclaimed Maud.

Courtenay took up a book.

"As to caring what people think of me," said Maud, turning quickly round, after a few moments' silence; "I'll tell you how much I care! I choose to act so scrupulously that they shall have no shadow of an excuse for finding fault; and then, if they wish to abuse me, let them. It is, perhaps, rather a compliment."

"Oh! you are soon come to life again," remarked Courtenay, looking up.

"Did you hear what I said?" asked Maud.

"Perfectly," he replied.

"And did you see how it applied to all the nonsense you have been talking?" she asked impatiently.

"No; it did not seem at all to bear upon the case in point," he replied; "but it was a very good remark—a very good remark."

"Now that I never will forgive!" exclaimed Maud.

"'Quel travail delicat!
Cet ouvrage de femme est d'un goût, d'un éclat!'"

said Courtenay, looking over the work-frame at which Maud was employed.

"That's from Delavigne—you have been reading '*Les Enfans d'Edouard*,'" said Maud, taking up Courtenay's book.

"Certainly it is no difficult task to make you speak," said Courtenay; "not like the old woman in the Scotch song, 'Get up and bar the door.'"

"How I hate you!" exclaimed Maud.

"Well, how long do you mean to keep me waiting?" asked Courtenay.

"A hundred years," said Maud.

"And suppose I won't wait?"

"That will be best of all," said Maud; "for it is entirely against my will that I have anything to say to you."

"I know how I'll bring you to reason," said Courtenay. "I'll fetch over Mrs. Creswick to Forrel; she will reduce you to terms. I know you are afraid of her."

"Afraid of her?" echoed Maud. "She is the best friend I have in the world. You can't do better than drive her over to-morrow morning; she will be sure to take my side."

"We shall see," replied Mr. Courtenay; and accordingly the very next morning he drove over to Erlsmede, and brought Mrs. Creswick back with him.

"So, my dear Maud," said Mrs. Creswick, as soon as she entered, "you are resolved, I find, to put your lover's constancy to a pretty strong test; he has waited already two years and a quarter, and you still think it advisable to put him off. Well, I hope it won't be for very long."

"Oh, he has been telling tales of me as you came along," said Maud, darting an angry glance at Mr. Courtenay, who stood quietly leaning against the window.

"Saved you all the trouble of the explanation," he remarked.

"And what time do you really mean to fix for your marriage?" asked Mrs. Creswick; "because, you know, when you talk of a hundred years, why, we should like some of us to be alive to see the day."

"Especially the principals," remarked Courtenay.

"How I hate his dry ways!" exclaimed Maud.

"Some day you will come to me and say, 'How I like his dry ways!'" said Mrs. Creswick.

"That she will," said Courtenay.

"Now listen, Mrs. Creswick," said Maud. "I ask you if that disagreeable person, leaning so awkwardly there against the window-frame, is not a widower in the eyes of the world?"

"Almost, I am afraid," said Mrs. Creswick, smiling.

"How soon is it thought decent for the hardest-hearted and most unfeeling widowers to marry again?"

"Mr. Courtenay?" said Mrs. Creswick, hardly able to refrain from laughing at her manner.

"A hard-hearted widower is permitted to marry again in six months," said Mr. Courtenay, coolly; "but when his heart is extra hard, as in the present case, it is thought reasonable that he should be kept waiting only five weeks."

"What say you; shall he be judge in his own case?" asked Mrs. Creswick.

"No; that he shall not!" said Maud.

"We both agreed to refer our cause to you," said Courtenay.

"Did I?" said Maud.

"Ah; now you want to draw stakes," said Courtenay.

"No; I think Mrs. Creswick will take my part," said Maud.

"One says five weeks and the other says a hundred years," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Five weeks is perfect nonsense!" exclaimed Maud, eagerly.

"And I am sure so is a hundred years," returned Mr. Courtenay, laughing.

"Then I think we will treat him as one of the hard-hearted widowers," said Mrs. Creswick. "My dear Maud, in six months I may congratulate you by the name of Mrs. Courtenay."

* * * * *

Maud was received with ecstasy by Mr. Courtenay's father and his two maiden aunts, when upon her marriage they went down into Devonshire. The old gentleman was a finished specimen of an older and a better school than the present time can show. She found a stately mansion, an extensive park, everything on a grand scale. The single aunts, richly and quietly dressed, with the air of perfect gentlewomen, did the honours of their brother's house with a pleasing tranquillity. It was evident that everybody idolised Mr. Courtenay; everything he said, did, or thought, to the veriest trifle, was registered and adopted. His father looked up to him; his aunts would certainly have walked up to the chin in the lake that ornamented the park if he had dropped the slightest hint that he should like to see them in such a situation. These kind-hearted ladies were also tormented with anxieties respecting his diet, which to a man who never cared and hardly knew what he ate was rather an unnecessary trouble. They would draw Maud aside after breakfast, and inquire whether she had noticed his preference for any particular dish; would fear that their country cook was unable to prepare the sort of dishes he had been accustomed to in London; would try and surprise her into confiding to them whether he preferred peas to cauliflowers, or turkey poults to spring chickens; they disturbed themselves greatly that their melons were backward that year, because he had once in a fit of absence asked for melon with his cheese instead of radishes; and they became quite agitated whenever they gave a party to know exactly what neighbours he would wish to invite, and whether he liked many or few guests at dinner.

Maud always said they were a thousand times too good to think about him at all, and that he had better answer for himself, to which end she used to call him, and make known to him the subject of discussion in her own way.

"Come here, and thank your aunts for wishing to know whether you like green peas; or tell your aunts that you never in your life saw such fine strawberries as they gave you at dessert yesterday; or assure your aunts that you don't eat melons; and let them know that their cook is equal to the man at the University Club."

Mr. Courtenay gravely echoed her remarks, and left his aunts in perplexity at Maud's boldness, and his wonderful amiability.

Maud, for his sake, would have been upheld as the model of all earthly excellence; but her beauty, gaiety, and good-temper so won their hearts. that they really did not know how to pay her homage enough; indeed old Mr. Courtenay remarked to his son that it appeared quite wonderful that with such a brilliant creature as Maud in the neighbourhood, his choice should in the first instance have fallen upon Miss Reynolds. Mr. Courtenay quietly replied that it was rather singular, that there was no accounting for tastes, but that as Miss Reynolds was lost to him, he thought he had supplied her place indifferently well. This conversation happened to pass in Maud's hearing, and the kind aunts looked nervously at her, fearing that she might be pained at being reminded that she had not been first in Mr. Courtenay's regard; and the eldest of the two, who had once had a disappointment, whispered to her that people, especially young men, never did marry their first loves, and that she hoped Maud had firmness enough not to mind what Charles had said.

Maud assured them that she had sufficient firmness *never* to mind what Charles said; and as a proof of it, she was going to ride a horse that very day which he had expressly forbidden her to mount.

Although he had an odd way of expressing his attachment, Maud had every reason to believe it was unbounded. He made good what he had once said to Florence—that he could never refuse anything to a person whom he loved. He never opposed Maud's fancies, even when he most disapproved of them. He would coolly say:

"I think it very absurd; there is no sense in the thing; but if you wish it, do it."

When she found that this was always the case, the natural generosity of her disposition prevented her making an undue use of his indulgence.

In the autumn they went abroad with Leonard, and they all remained in Italy during the winter. When he returned his friends had no longer occasion to sigh over his morbid inactivity. The suffering he had undergone forced him to turn to the business of life in order to forget its sorrows; and although many years passed before he was able to admit that another woman could ever possess his heart, yet at last, to the great joy of his family, he gave a mistress to Forrel Court. He "waited for Lucy." At seventeen she was a warm-hearted, amiable girl, and beautiful as a dream. She was always very much with Maud, which Mrs. Reynolds encouraged in the hope that some day something might come of it, and great was her joy when she at last heard that her daughter and Leonard were actually engaged to be married. Mr. Reynolds was equally pleased at the match. He had a vague idea that he owed Leonard some reparation for not having been able to give him his daughter; and like many hard people, he had taken a singular fancy to him, scarcely inferior to the affection he felt for his own son.

Ada Thomason was as happy as could be expected, considering all

things. Sir Frederic was very fond of her, but he was always getting into difficulties, and then Mr. Courtenay had to be sent for to put things straight again.

Mr. Thomason had prudently tied up his daughter's fortune so carefully, that it was not likely she would ever be actually reduced to beggary; but money was always a source of perplexity to both of them; for Ada was just as improvident as her husband.

Mrs. Thomason liked the match, however. It gave her something to sigh about. Sometimes she could lament over her poor daughter Lady Manning, who was about to increase her family. Sometimes she could moan over Sir Frederic's extraordinary whims and fancies, which were indeed enough to try anybody. Once he fitted up a yacht, and carried Ada off to Iceland; and his first child was born off the coast of Norway. Then he started with his whole establishment for Lisbon, and took a villa at Belem for the summer. Now he would threaten to pull down the Manor House; and then he would build up all sorts of odd towers at the corners, and talk of turning it into a castle. Poor Mrs. Thomason had need to remember that Ada was a baronet's wife, and that a good many young ladies would have been very glad if they could have taken her place, to bear up against the perpetual terrors that assailed her from the Manor House. He built a sledge, and nearly drowned himself and Ada in driving over the ice. He met with all sorts of accidents with hurdle-racing and steeple-chases. But whenever they came to London, Lady Manning was cited everywhere as a great beauty; and, though Mrs. Thomason assured her intimate friends that nobody knew what her daughter's trials and troubles really were, they were both tolerably contented with the lot she had so wilfully chosen.

Mrs. Stapylton married all her four daughters. She managed to engage Mr. Sharpe to Albina, without his having any suspicion of what she was about until it was too late. Report does say that she locked him in the drawing-room one day alone with herself, and there went through such a scene of maternal despair, that even he was softened, and he compassionately offered, if it would be any satisfaction to her, to marry her daughter.

Mr. Meek married Sarah; and when he got a living the next curate married Emily, who had devoted herself to the Sunday-schools when the Cornet of Dragoons went away; and Laura married an old man, who did not dislike red hair.

Manœuvring mothers are sometimes represented as failing, but they much oftener succeed. Only when they do fail, they retire from the field covered with ridicule. But Mrs. Stapylton, who succeeded, was quoted all over the county as the best of mothers.

The military cousin, whom Leonard used to envy, was last heard of in the Greek Isles, where his regiment was stationed, and whence he used to send every now and then to borrow money from Mr. Courtenay. As he was perfectly incapable of doing any good, he

naturally looked about to see if he could do any harm. (I think it is Bolinbroke, who remarks somewhere that the one is a very ordinary consequence of the other;) and having gone over to Athens, not I assure you, with a view of indulging in any classic reminiscences, but merely in the hope of having some fun, he was enabled to break to pieces the head of a figure in one of the finest friezes in the Parthenon.

This was a valuable achievement, for the head was said to be singularly beautiful, and the frieze in a high state of preservation, until it was so cleverly mutilated. Moreover, the enthusiastic Greek who takes care of the Parthenon was thrown into a state of despair and grief, bordering on frenzy, at the destruction of one of his beloved marbles. So that the military cousin had even more fun than he expected, and was very much admired by his companions, though their eulogiums fell far short of those he bestowed upon himself.

It is singular that a fatality seemed to pursue the five degraded wretches who made Miss Reynolds' fortune the subject of a wager. The fate of Captain O'Neill, and of Captain Le Grange has been mentioned, the Count de Merville fell in his turn in a duel at the Bois de Vincennes, Mr. Taylor was drowned at a regatta, and Mr. Roxby's lot was perhaps even less enviable; married to a rich old woman of the most revolting temper and habits, and held up to the derision of all his acquaintance, from the base submission with which he bore her tyrannical caprices.

And Mr. Warrenne lived tranquilly among his children. Keeping up nominally his old house at Erlsmede, where Karl still reigned over the white horse and the greyhound;—but dividing his time as equally as possible between Maud and Leonard; for Alice had her share when he was at home, the distance being near enough to see him every day.

He lived pursuing his botanical researches, and writing his botanical treatises; and doing good to those who were in want of assistance, and almost softening even the acrimony of Mr. Ranger by the mildness of his religious practice—but not—thank Heaven!—*not* loved and respected by everybody around.

Valued by those who honoured worth, and loved by all who sought to imitate the benevolence of his life, he was altogether disliked by those who are afraid of moral dignity, and to whom integrity is a reproach. But he had always been thoroughly indifferent to the applause of men; he did not care and he never sought to inform himself of what people said. He was happy enough in his own family to let the world judge as it pleased, and, moreover, he was singularly happy in being able no longer to call himself a Medical Practitioner.

THE END.

MRS. HENRY WOOD AND WORCESTERSHIRE.

WRITING of her first stay in London, an American author said that her greatest pleasure lay, not in the associations of celebrated persons and events in real life, but in the connection of the characters and incidents of her favourite author, Dickens, with the places and scenes she visited. As she passed through the streets, or visited famous houses and places, she realized much more vividly that she was in the haunts of Dick Swiveller, Sam Weller, Mrs. Gamp, etc., than in those of the celebrities whose deeds and writings are matters of world-renown.

Something of this feeling is, no doubt, experienced by most imaginative and impressionable persons in a neighbourhood or town endeared to them as the scene of favourite books. It would be a great advantage in many ways, if every novelist of note would, in his writings, "work up" the county or town with which he is most familiar; for, putting fiction aside, the gain to the topographical history and folk-knowledge of England—a very important and too much neglected branch of social history—would be great, and the pleasures of travelling would be considerably heightened. What an interesting and valuable picture of the varied phases of life, of which our little island is the scene, would be presented to a reader, if there were a novelist to do for every county what Mrs. Henry Wood has done for Worcestershire!

Whilst the latter has not confined herself exclusively to the one county in her writings, many of her books, and those in which she evidently took great pleasure herself, were all localized in the Faithful City or its shire.

There are few towns in England which can surpass Worcestershire for historical and antiquarian interests, but as I drive down the Tything, and the Cross, and along dear old High Street, on my occasional visits, for me the celebrities of real life have a very hazy existence; but I always feel that Squire Todhetley, accompanied by Tod and Johnny, is driving Bob and Blister in front of me, and if I put up at the "Star and Garter," I shall surely see them. When the college boys come clattering through the Close at dinner time, and tear off to their respective homes, I can see the young Channings and Yorkes, the Halliburtons and Sankers amongst them, and I always look out specially for dear Stephen Bywater. Many a time I have had lunch at the confectioner's in High Street, from which Toby Sanker used to buy the penny pork-pies for the improvised dinners of that ill-regulated household.

I often walk round the Close, trying to fix on the Channings'

house, and, in fancy, hear Roland Yorke's tremendous peals on the bell. Here is the scene of the tragedy with which the book, bearing his name, opens; and I never stand at the wall to the west of the beautiful Cathedral, below which the river winds its lovely course, without thinking of the mischievous college boys mounted thereon, throwing poor old Ketch's keys into the swift-flowing water. The sight of a barge floating along, brings to mind poor Charley Channing and his misadventure—a true incident, which we believe really occurred many years ago in the city.

One might continue such recollections indefinitely, so completely is the whole city incorporated with one or other of Mrs. Henry Wood's tales; but I wish specially to refer here, to the charge occasionally brought against her of exaggeration and improbability in her plots and incidents, a charge which in my opinion is utterly unfounded. In general, all elderly persons, at all events, must have learned, by life's experience, that truth is stranger than fiction, and that it would be almost impossible for a novelist to invent more improbable things than the happenings of real life; and in particular, I have it on excellent authority, that our authoress had a most remarkable experience of life and people; and never invented a single plot that had not in it a substratum of truth: truth and fiction being cunningly blended together, as it is in the works of all our greatest novelists, from Scott downwards. And often it will be found that the most improbable incidents are those drawn, not from imagination, but from fact. Though quite unacquainted with Mrs. Henry Wood, and only coming to reside in her county after her death, I have myself met with several exactly parallel cases of some of her incidents.

As it is true that history repeats itself, so is it no less so, that the curious chains of events, and good and evil deeds, which constitute the plots of novels, repeat themselves in real life.

Take the case of the death of John Ollivera, one of the best written but least probable of Mrs. Henry Wood's incidents. A few years ago, an almost precisely similar mystery occurred in the death of a young clergyman at Wolverhampton; a mystery which I believe has never yet been unravelled.

After all, the tales which fill the several volumes of the Johnny Ludlow Series, are made up of very simple material, the charm and fascination which they have for their thousands of readers, being in the manner of writing, and the accurate pictures of country life and people which they present—pictures as true and distinct as photographs, and which every one feels must have been drawn direct from nature.

Some great man has said that every person's life is worth writing, and would be interesting if written well; and certainly every small town with the adjacent country can furnish abundant material for such a work as Johnny Ludlow, if only it numbered amongst its inhabitants a literary "witch," who, like Mrs. Henry Wood, could

"make these dry bones live" by the mere force of her genius. In this one little country town, near which I have spent the last five years, I have found at least a dozen families, whose history would make far more interesting and romantic stories than those of the ordinary novel.

But interesting as her pictures of Worcester are, it is in her delineation of the rural life of the county, that one who has lived there can appreciate best Mrs. Henry Wood's thorough acquaintance with her subject and her power of presenting it to others. She has been charged with "unnaturalness" in the language and speech of her country-folk; I have heard people say they were sure that no such dialect could be found in England, and I confess that until I lived amongst them I also was doubtful. But a few months' acquaintance with the uncouth dialect, and curious, grating accent peculiar to this county, convinced me that on this point, more, perhaps, than on any other, Mrs. Henry Wood distinctly knew her work. In real life, as in her novels, these people seem to try how awkwardly they can word their sentences, and how often they can substitute the objective or possessive case for the nominative, and *vice versâ*; and how narrow a limit they can put to their verb conjugations. A man will say, "Now, Tom, let we have us dinners." *Be* is generally used for *am* and *are*; and *have* for *has*; while for *have* proper, we hear *haves*.

The scenes of a great portion of Johnny Ludlow's tales are laid in that part of the county which lies between the city and the Lickey Hills, the Severn and the county boundary; Crabb Cot lying just on the dividing line of Worcestershire and Warwickshire. In this area we find some of the prettiest villages, quaintest little towns, and most unspoiled phases of country life that the midland counties can offer. More charming villages than Clent, Hagley, or Ombersley (the scene of Bill Whitney's hunting accident), it would be hard to find; and wandering on a bright summer's morning down the little streets, past their quiet churches and pretty creeper-covered houses and cottages, one feels that one has indeed alighted on the originals of the lovely village which figures under so many different names in the books under discussion.

Worcestershire is remarkable for the number and variety of its country seats, and beautiful half-timbered houses. It is impossible to go far in any direction without meeting with some of the former, of which we find specimens of every description and grade, from the stately old castle and its modern imitation, to the rambling Tudor or Jacobean farmhouse of the well-to-do yeomen, a class of people of sterling worth, well represented in this county, and for whom Mrs. Wood seems to have entertained much respect, recognising and delineating them as the backbone of agricultural prosperity. We meet with them again and again in her books; the family of Coney, in "Johnny Ludlow," being an excellent example. It is with such families that I am best acquainted; and in exactly such a farmhouse as she has often

depicted (that in "Dene Hollow," for instance), I am writing these lines.

This class is frequently the equal of the less wealthy portion of the landed gentry in education, breeding, manner of life, and wealth; (in this respect, indeed, they often have the advantage), the difference being that they *rent*, instead of *own* their land, and generally their houses too. The homesteads are handed down from generation to generation, in some cases for hundreds of years, and they are as dear to the occupants as if they were their own possessions.

The house in which I am now living, is like the family, a typical one of its class, and was built by an ancestor near the site of the original one; and a good deal of the old brick and timber having been used again, it presents a much more antique appearance than it can really lay claim to. The polished oak landing and stairs look strangely out of keeping with the red quarried hall-floor; but in the wide, whitewashed kitchen (evidently built in the days when eight or ten men and women farm-hands sat down every day to share in the contents of the huge baking-oven) everything is in harmony; from the great open fire-place, where one can sit in the chimney corner and watch the smoke ascend straight up towards the sky, to the half-circular oak screen, or settle, and vast oak side-board, with its array of cider jugs and cups.

To speak of Worcestershire without mentioning cider, would certainly be to describe the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out. What would the dwellers in a non-cider-drinking county, say to the cellars of this house having contained at one time forty hogsheads, each of 100 gallon capacity, and two of 200 gallon, all filled with that delectable beverage one autumn, and emptied before the next? Yet such is a fact, and when one has seen a little of the habits of the people, it ceases to be a wonder. Summer and winter, day and night, beginning directly after breakfast, the cider is always flowing, and it is a matter of the barest civility to offer a jugful to every one who passes through one's yard. But if you wish to see it in *full* flow, just be about the yard on hunt days, when there is a "find" or a "kill" near the house.

Every man, whether he be acquainted with the master of the place or not, by virtue of that freemasonry which seems to exist alike amongst hunting men and cider-drinkers, crowds into the yard or garden, and has a good pull at the fine old Worcester mugs and loving cups, which are refilled as fast as emptied, from the buckets brought up out of the cellar!

One finds not only excellent old furniture, but exquisite antique china and silver in common use amongst these people. I see on the tables, every day, tea-sets and silver-ware, which *nouveaux riches* and curiosity-mongers would gladly buy for drawing-room ornaments.

I do not recollect that Mrs. Henry Wood dwells much on scenery in her novels, excepting in so far as it is necessary to the working-out

or setting of the story—"word-painting" had not become the fashion in the days when her style was formed—but what descriptions she does give us are very clear-cut and distinct, and generally intensely Worcestershire. If I were asked to describe one or two typical bits of the scenery of this county, I could not do better than refer the questioner to the pictures of his home, in the tale of "Francis Radcliffe," for one kind; and to the opening chapters of "Trevlyn Hold" for another. The "setting" of "Dene Hollow," and "The Shadow of Ashlydyat" is also singularly good; and with the neighbourhood of the latter I am well acquainted. But the old, old house surrounded by lofty elms, with their hundreds of cawing rooks, that formed "Selina Radcliffe's Home," is as truly a photograph from nature as any that was ever taken; and one only fails to localize it exactly, because the counterpart is met with so many times in dear, pretty Worcestershire. Mrs. Henry Wood has indeed conferred a distinction upon her county, which can never be too thoroughly recognized or too greatly appreciated.

S. M. C.

NIGHT.

How softly shine these moonbeams pale and clear,
Through balmy air stirred by the summer breeze,
Which rustles lightly through the leafy trees,
Moving the surface of yon silver mere.
Sweet Philomel sing on! No one is near
Save I thy lover! Surely nights like these
Were sent by Heaven to cure the heart's disease:
Bear thou thy part, O singer born to cheer.

Like a cool hand laid on a throbbing head,
Thy face is, Mother Earth, by night and day;
Our tears are soothed away as soon as shed,
When to thy kind brown cheek our cheek we lay;
And thou wilt fold us to thine arms when dead,
Till death's long night for ever pass away!

Norah McCormick.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE CHAPEL OF VILLA CRISTINA.

A CHEERFUL white road, flecked with shadows from the golden-branched willows which bordered it, alternating with high greyish-white walls, or vari-tinted peasants' houses. Beyond, a stretch of green and red and purple mountain; above, a cloudless, deep blue sky. These were the main impressions grasped by my somewhat tired powers of observation, as I drove from the Pistoia station to the villa of my friends the Gherardi, one Christmas Eve some few years ago.

I had made a mistake and arrived at Pistoia at 2.30 instead of at six o'clock. Consequently neither my friend Hilda nor her husband was there to meet me: I therefore engaged one of the shabby little fiacres outside the station, and requested its whip-cracking, top-hatted driver to take me to Villa Cristina.

Our progress was slow; but the warmth and brightness were so delightful that I should not have minded had the road been twice as long. At last we turned into an open gateway, and drove up a winding road bordered by low hedges of rose-bushes, bright with crimson seed-pods, and stopped before a large grey stone villa with a wide gravel terrace. Before the driver had time to descend from the box, the hall door was flung open, and my friend Hilda ran down the half-dozen steps to welcome me, full of regrets at the mistake which had given me so lonely a drive.

"You must be exhausted," she continued, as we entered the enormous hall. "I shall take you straight to your rooms, and you must rest till dinner."

"I am really far more dusty than tired—for I slept well last night—you know I am a good traveller; and the carriage was not crowded. But do just as you like with me—only I think I should be the better, and better-looking, for some soap and hot water. Don't you?"

Hilda laughed; and, putting her arm through mine, led me up a curious frescoed staircase, along a corridor, and into a charming boudoir, where a bright wood-fire was burning. Beyond this was my bed-room, where I removed my travel stains, and then rejoined Hilda who was sitting by the boudoir fire.

First conversations between friends who have been separated for several years are rarely satisfactory. Perhaps this comes from the fact that the great amount each has to say and ask necessitates the impressionist manner of treating each subject; and, as friends naturally desire detailed descriptions, the mere superficial summary of facts causes that vague feeling of disappointment we have all experienced on such occasions.

My talk with Hilda was no exception to this rule, and I think it

was a relief to both of us when the servant brought in tea, and asked if he should tell the Signorina.

"Certainly," Hilda answered; adding, as the man left the room: "It won't tire you, having Beatrice Sartori for tea, will it? She is longing to see you, and is all alone; every one else is out."

"Of course not," I answered. "I was so glad to know she was with you, poor child! How is she? Do you think she is at all less unhappy?"

"Not much as yet; in fact, I sometimes think she misses her mother more as time goes on—you will understand, for you saw how much they were to each other. And then there is something else which troubles her; only she must tell you that herself; I know she is really fond of you."

Two years before, I had met Marchesa and Beatrice Sartori, at Schwalbach, and made great friends with them. Marchesa Sartori, an English woman by birth, and a widow, was already extremely ill, and she died the spring preceding my story, leaving Beatrice to the guardianship of her father's cousin, Piero Gherardo, husband of my friend Hilda.

Beatrice came in quickly, and greeted me with warm Italian demonstrativeness; tears were in her eyes, but were not allowed to fall. She looked even prettier than formerly, though very delicate; perhaps a trifle too slight in figure, and her features a shade too defined; but her eyes, large-pupilled and grey, looked softer than ever, with the purple shade below them, and the lights in her brown hair more golden, contrasted with the blackness of her dress.

During tea, I inquired if there were any other guests in the house; for Hilda, an impossible correspondent, had only mentioned Beatrice when inviting me.

"Oh yes, quite a family gathering," she answered. "Piero's sister and her husband, and children, the Carpacci; also Piero's two brothers, Mario and Vincenzo—the latter a priest, you know."

"Yes; you really did happen to mention having a priest brother-in-law in one of your first letters, but you never told me about the other, Mario."

"Really? how funny of me, for he is the remarkable one of the family. My dear husband is as good as gold, but he never pretends to be a shining light of intelligence. In fact, Piero and Laura have always been called the stupid ones of the family, and as far as she is concerned—bless her!—the term is pretty well deserved."

I laughed.

"But Mario," she continued, laughing also, "is quite an important personage; he is a deputy, but also a philanthropist and social reformer; a modern practical Don Quixote, in fact, and with a craze for the English, their social and moral institutions—so you are safe to get on with him, my Eleanor."

A knock at the door, and a message from her husband, interrupted

Hilda. Conte Piero begged her to give him a few minutes for some matter of business; and she went immediately, telling Beatrice to look after me.

When left alone, I tried to tell her—what of course I had already written—how deeply I felt for her. There is always very little that can be *said;* but I believe any real sympathy is somehow *felt*, and is just a little help and comfort.

I gathered that what Beatrice found hardest was her loneliness, the thought that no one needed her. They were all most kind, most good to her, but after the mutual dependence, the oneness of heart and interests, that had existed between her and her mother, it was inexpressibly painful to find herself unneeded, and, in a way, an outsider. To feel oneself alone in the midst of kindness is perhaps harder to bear than actual solitude, by dint of contrast with the fulness of the lives around one.

I felt, however, that there was, as Hilda had hinted, some other trouble. But Beatrice in no way alluded to it, and I did not attempt to guess. I knew I should hear about it in due time. Some people are born to be told things: and though it is doubtless more interesting to be born to have them to tell, it is well to be philosophical, and remember, there is yet a third category,—those who are born neither to hear nor to tell.

I made acquaintance with the rest of the family at dinner, a very cheery meal, in a large hall painted with a landscape of trees, and hills, and sky.

Hilda's and the Carpacci's children were, in Italian fashion, present, and took up a good deal of every one's attention. I sat between my host and Padre Vincenzo the priest, and found the latter most attractive. He was rather *distrait* in manner, but possessed of an almost tender courtesy, and the most charming of smiles.

Beatrice sat between two of the children, and Mario Gherardo next one of them. He was tall and dark, and handsome, with the marked profile of an old Roman coin. Like Padre Vincenzo, and in contrast to Madame Carpacci and Piero, he was almost ascetically thin. I had very little opportunity of talking to him, as the children insisted on retaining his attention. I noticed, however, that he had the same courtesy of manner as his brother the priest, but joined to a decisiveness of speech and observancy of look, which denoted him a doer as well as a thinker.

I know not how, unless it was by some change in look or voice when addressing her,—but somehow I felt convinced, before dinner was over, that Mario cared for Beatrice. And I wondered if it was there that the trouble lay.

The remaining members of this family group, Madame Carpacci and her husband, struck me chiefly by their extreme resemblance to each other, and difference to Mario and Padre Vincenzo. She seemed much more the sister of her husband than of her brothers; unless, in-

deed, it were Piero, who might be described as the missing link between them, both physically and intellectually.

After dinner, great games went on with the children in the large galleried music-hall. I was not allowed to join in them, on the score of fatigue; but sat and talked to Padre Vincenzo, near an immense open fire-place of old carved stone.

As soon as the children had been carried off to bed by their nurses, their elders joined us, and Piero almost immediately asked Beatrice to sing. I felt very sorry for her; I knew how singing to me would recall many happy evenings at Schwalbach. But she took up her guitar at once, and sang song after song—avoiding, though, I noticed, those she used to sing at her mother's request.

She had the most charming voice, rich, and with that sort of thrill, which has nothing to do with the wearisome "tremolo" so common to Italian singers—but is best defined by the French as, "ayant les larmes dans la voix."

At the request of Piero, she ended with a profoundly melancholy Apulian song, which had, I remember, for refrain the words "sotto l'altare," and which with its passionate monotonous minor cadences seemed to open a vista of the woes of the whole world. It was a most unfortunate choice to have made; and I saw Mario look at her from time to time with concern and sympathy. She sang it through, however, with perfect self-control; and my eyes met Mario's with a look of friendly congratulation.

The momentary silence which followed was broken by Madame Carpacci, who exclaimed: "I do believe that is what the ghosts sing in the chapel! At any rate it is quite dismal enough."

Hilda gave a semi-despairing, semi-resigned shrug of the shoulders, and a reproachful, "Oh, Laura!" as she looked from her to Beatrice.

The latter caught her look, and smiling, answered, "Dear Hilda! but you did not think I had forgotten?"

"I hoped so! but Piero and Laura are impossible!"

"Why, what have we done?" asked Madame Carpacci in all innocence.

"Raised the ghost question; and just to-night too!"

Laura clasped her hands dramatically. "What a head! I utterly forgot that you didn't want Beatrice to think of them."

"But Beatrice was thinking of them," the girl interrupted her. And I, impatient to understand the meaning of it all, inquired:

"What 'them'? Please tell me why are you all so incomprehensibly mysterious?"

Piero, his sister, and her husband, in truly Italian fashion, answered in chorus—

Mme. C.—"The ghosts in our empty chapel——"

M. C.—"They come on the eve of all the great festas."

Piero.—"Several people swear they have seen them."

Mme. C.—"I myself have *heard* them, from my room."

M. C.—"And so did Hilda's sailor cousin."

Piero.—"Yes, but he said it sounded like the 'Marseillaise'!"

Mme. C.—"That was because he was '*incredule.*'"

And she paused, out of breath—while I noticed that Mario looked grave, and Beatrice troubled, and Hilda said to me *sotto voce:* "My dear, can't you turn the conversation?"

But before I had time to utter a word, Madame Carpacci called out to Padre Vincenzo, who, during Beatrice's singing, had retired to the other side of the room, and remained apparently immersed in some book: "Vincenzo, *you* have heard the ghosts sing in the chapel, haven't you?"

He rose, and came towards us, holding his book behind him; a kindly smile about his mouth. Mario walked across to the piano, and began turning over music. He evidently wished to keep out of the conversation. And Hilda whispered explanatorily: "We are in for a discussion of the supernatural, and as we are a mixture of 'blacks' and 'whites,' the subject is as dangerous as Home Rule would be where there were Tories and Radicals."

The priest paused a moment, then said very quietly, "Yes, I heard chanting last Easter Eve, and it seemed to come from the empty chapel. But," he continued very slowly and thoughtfully, "I always feel that the perception of supernatural sounds or sights is mental; not of the senses—mind only is fine enough to be conscious of spirit—matter cannot come in touch with it."

"'Mind' here standing for imagination, eh?" suggested Piero.

"No," the priest answered gravely; "not imagination, but perception. Mind both conceives and perceives; here it perceives."

"Well, anyhow *you* believe in our chapel ghosts," Madame Carpacci said with a sigh of comfort. "But now I want to know if you believe what that old French governess of ours tells me—I went to see her this afternoon, and she told me more extraordinary things than ever." Then turning politely to me, she explained: "This lady lost her daughter five years ago, a quite young girl; but she believes she has visits from her spirit constantly, although she never *sees* her; but she knows when she is there, and she tells her everything she wants to learn. She only has to take a pencil in her hand, and all the answers come to her."

"What, even the winning numbers in the Lottery?" came from Mario, in a tone of good-humoured raillery, as he left the piano and took the chair beside mine. "How extremely convenient!"

His sister laughed. "How stupid of me, I never thought of asking her that. But, Mario, she, poor thing, is most serious about it; and the things she tells me are most serious too; all about the other worlds, planets, and so on, where her daughter says people go to when they die."

Mario laughed incredulously.

"Some are for good, and some for bad spirits, I *think* she said,

but I remember that every one's penance is to come back here, and to haunt the places where they had most sinned, until they expiated them."

"That's not a bad idea," said Piero. "I wonder what place you will haunt, Laura?"

"Her Parisian dressmaker's establishment," her husband replied promptly.

"And lucky you if you haunt nothing worse than your tailor's!" laughed Hilda.

"But in that case," interposed Mario, "you and Laura will be—how can one say it?—divided, for your tailor lives in London. Is it part of the penance, do you think, the dooming of husbands and wives to perpetual separation?"

"It depends," suggested Hilda maliciously, "on how they got on with one another. It might be the greater penance to be together. In fact, now that I think of it, I seem to see the planets full of the ghosts of married people (especially Italians!) in perpetual contiguity!"

"Which terrible vision," continued Mario, in the same tone, "leaves us with the problem, how can they both carry out their doom of haunting each the scenes of his or her worst earthly iniquities (which can very rarely be one and the same), and that of tormenting each other by being for ever together? You must ask your friend for more precise information, Laura."

I fancied Beatrice looked pained at the somewhat flippantly sarcastic turn conversation had taken; but Madame Carpacci took it all *au grand sérieux*, and answered:

"I'll try and remember to ask her, but I always forget most of what she tells me—or don't understand it. I do remember one other thing though, because it was so very dreadful. She actually said her daughter had told her that Pope Pius IX. had to haunt the Vatican, because hypocrisy had been his worst sin in pretending to be kept prisoner there, when he might have come out whenever he liked."

Complete silence greeted this astoundingly inappropriate anecdote. Then Hilda caught her breath, saying almost inaudibly, "I knew she would put her foot in it," as she looked across me at Mario, with an imploring elevation of the eyebrows. He repressed his smile of amusement, and nodded assurance of silence, whilst Beatrice kept her eyes fixed on Padre Vincenzo, who, by the slightest flicker about the lips showed that he too had the passing thought 'save us from fools.' But a moment after he said with his usual gentle courtesy:

"My dear Laura, I think you had better tell your friend to take care lest she have to haunt all the places in which she has attended to other people's affairs instead of her own. I fear it might be rather a lengthy penance."

I did not hear if Madame Carpacci promised to do this also, for Hilda rose, and saying I must be tired out, sent Mario for candles,

and after cordial good-nights and wishes for good repose, she and Beatrice accompanied me to my room.

As we stood over the fire, Hilda gave a sigh and exclaimed, "If you knew what it was to have to steer clear of shoals with all these differently thinking people!"

"But they were all very nice and good-tempered about it; and it really was most amusing," I answered.

"Yes, to-night; but it isn't always so. Sometimes they get excited, and say more than they mean, and just now I especially regret such discussions," she added meaningly, as she put her arm on Beatrice's shoulder, and kissed her.

"Will you tell Eleanor why, dear?" she continued. "I want you to talk to her, for you are kindred spirits, and understand each other."

Beatrice smiled at me, but sighed as she answered, "Yes, I want to talk to Eleanor; but not to-night; she is far too tired."

"Indeed she is not," I replied; "neither too tired, nor too sleepy. And anyhow I should not go to bed to-night till after twelve o'clock. So if you will stay and talk to me, dear, you will give me a great pleasure."

"I may, then, Hilda? And at twelve, you know, I am going to the chapel."

"Dearest, let me beg you not. You know it will be bad for you. Please—please give up the idea."

"But, indeed, it won't be bad for me at all. Besides, I must go, I can't help it. C'est plus fort que moi!"

Hilda continued to implore her to alter her intention, but in vain. She was quietly determined, and at length Hilda gave in, partially reassured by my offer of accompanying her being accepted.

"You are very tiresome people," she ejaculated, as she took up her candle and bid us good-night. "I shall have Beatrice in bed with a nervous attack to-morrow, and Eleanor with a collapse from exhaustion. So a nice cheerful Christmas you are preparing us."

As soon as she had gone I threw myself into a low chair by the fire, and Beatrice knelt before it, meditatively blowing its cheerful flames into further brightness.

"Padre Vincenzo is coming, too," she said presently. "He has given up attending the midnight mass on purpose. He is good beyond words."

"But won't you tell me now, dear, what it is that troubles you?" I asked her gently.

She passed her hand over her brow, pushing up the wave of soft hair, which fell naturally back again; then, sitting on the rug and leaning against my knees, she looked steadily into the fire, and said, very slowly:

"I will try and tell you; and then, if you can, you will help me, won't you? I am very unhappy just now because Mario——" she

paused, and I, leaning forward, rested my lips on her hair, and finished the sentence for her, "Mario cares for you. Yes, dear, I know that much; I saw it."

"And I care for him," she continued, with that thrill in her voice, "with all my heart, with every fibre of my being."

"Dearest, but that is good."

She gave a deep long sigh, and for a few moments there was silence, save the crackling of the firewood, and the little murmur of the flames.

"I will try and tell you," she resumed presently, "but it isn't easy. He is good—oh, so noble and so great, so far above most of us, but he is honestly and avowedly an unbeliever in religion, and I do not know if I may dare trust myself to marry him. Can you understand? I fear I am weak, Eleanor, but if I care for any one, I cannot help seeing their point of view, and though it does not alter my own, yet it is always there as a barrier. And, oh, my dear, it is terrible to have to be, even in the least, on the defensive with one you love."

"My poor child, I do know. I understand. But you would not let him go, would you, because of this? Don't you think that would be the worst possible thing for him? It would make him feel you were afraid of losing your belief, and then he would think it could not be a thing much worth having. Don't you think the best way would be to trust God—and your love?"

"For myself yes, a thousand times yes! But I am not clever, or good, and if I should harm him, make him think even less well of religion because of my failures and faults?"

"Dearest, don't you think here too you had better trust? Keep close, obey, and you will be able to shine. And so he will see that what you believe 'makes for good.'"

She laid her cheek against my hands.

"You are right; I am sure you are right. But it will be very, very difficult."

"I know it, oh, so well! Things always are so difficult and puzzling in the detail, though clear in the abstract. But all great decisions must be guided by the latter, must they not?"

"If only," she continued, unheeding me, "if only he could believe what Padre Vincenzo said to-night: that our minds—though perhaps not his as yet," she said with infinite tenderness of tone, "but our minds can perceive, can feel and know things of which the senses are for ever unconscious. I have seen a glimmer of questioning pass over his face at times when Padre Vincenzo has said or done something very 'other-worldly:' as if he were thinking, 'May he not have some power after all, which is above and beyond what I know of?' But the others are so trying—you saw to-night. Is it not sad how difficult some quite good believers make belief for others?"

We continued talking for some time, I saying all I could to en-

courage her to trust and to hope, when my eyes fell on the clock, and seeing it was half-past eleven, I asked if we should not go to the chapel. She assented, and as she wrapped my cloak around me, laid her face caressingly against mine, and thanked me with such sweetness for "the help and comfort I had given."

We passed along the corridor outside, and entered a sitting-room whose window opened on to a terrace. It lay white in the moonlight, and a great stillness reigned as we walked across it to a door which opened into the gallery of the chapel. There were stools by the railing, and we knelt and prayed.

Presently I looked over into the space below. At first I could distinguish nothing in the darkness, but gradually my eyes grew accustomed to it, and I made out rows of empty seats, and a deserted altar, with a kneeling figure before it, which I guessed was Padre Vincenzo's.

What silence! one seemed to hear one's own heart-beats. I looked at Beatrice. She knelt with her elbows on the railings, her chin resting on her clasped hands; her lips were slightly parted, and her eyes gazing intently before her.

The silence became oppressive: I covered my face with my hands as I knelt, and tried to concentrate my thoughts. A movement of my companion made me raise my head. *The chapel was full of people!* I had heard nothing: no one had come in: but they *were there;* rows and rows of kneeling forms, with bowed heads, or upturned faces; clasped or outstretched hands, men, women, old and young, rich and poor. I saw them distinctly, how I know not, there seemed no need of light; they were there; one seemed to feel as well as see them.

And then arose the sound of voices, and a shiver struck through me from head to foot. I could catch no words, they always evaded me; but the tones of the voices were more expressive than any words; it is impossible to describe the depths of sorrow, repentance, entreaty they revealed.

A feeling of positive pain came over me, of profoundest compassion. Beatrice felt it too; I heard her breathe, "Oh, poor souls, poor souls, what can we do for you? Can *we* not expiate? Ah, let me expiate, and give them rest; oh, give them rest!"

And still the voices continued. I heard a movement behind me, and turning, saw Mario standing, his gaze intently fixed on Beatrice. He had evidently heard her prayer. He was pale, his lips set. Beatrice, unconscious of his presence, remained kneeling, stretched half over the railing. Mario came the other side of me.

"Look," I whispered; "you see them?" pointing below.

"I see my brother Vincenzo," he answered in the same tone.

"What, nothing else? Look again! and listen. It *can't* be that you see nothing, hear nothing?"

He shook his head. "Absolutely nothing!" he answered, and I saw that it was true.

I tried again, however, seeing and hearing so distinctly myself. "But those voices, so soul-piercing, how is it you only cannot hear them?" But he paid no further attention; he was looking at Beatrice, and I knew that would be best for him. Who loves understands, and he would not fail to read the truth in her face.

I leant forward therefore, just as Padre Vincenzo rose from his knees, and turned towards the people.

Their voices sank into silence, as the words of the absolution, in low, distinct, vibrating tones fell from his lips:

"Misereatur vestri omnipotens Deus, et dimissis peccatis vestris, perducat vos ad vitam æternam. Amen."

A sigh waved through the chapel, and Padre Vincenzo, again raising his voice, gave the benediction: "Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus."

An "Amen," sounding like what one would imagine as "the last chord only to be heard in Heaven," swept over the chapel, and it was again empty; saving Padre Vincenzo, who was kneeling once more before the altar.

I looked at Beatrice; she had buried her face in her hands, and I felt she was crying. Tears too were on my cheeks. Somehow gratitude has more power for loosening them than sorrow.

I heard Mario go quietly out. We remained some time longer, the bells of the little village churches ringing out their message of good tidings: "Peace on earth—goodwill—goodwill."

At last I turned and whispered, "Shall we not go?" Beatrice rose, then stood a moment, a look of immense gladness shining through her tears. We left Padre Vincenzo kneeling there.

Beatrice followed me across the terrace. Her hands still clasped before her; her eyes still looking into the beyond. Within the sitting-room was Mario; he came straight to her. I think he hardly realized I was present: at any rate he did not mind me.

She held out her hands to him. "Mario, we have seen them; you will believe it, will you not? And Padre Vincenzo has blessed them, and I trust they are at rest." She still had that look of gladness on her lips; of seeing behind and beyond in her eyes.

"My heart," he exclaimed passionately, holding her hands in his, gazing straight into her eyes, "I cannot lie, and *I* saw nothing: nothing but you! But that was enough for me! I am convinced, utterly and entirely, that you—yes, all three of you—saw and heard what I could neither see nor hear. For me there was nothing; but something there was of whose presence you all were conscious; and I think that some day the light will come to me also. Will not that suffice you, my own? Will you not now trust yourself to me?"

She simply held up her lips for answer, and I turned and left them, as the bells rang again out: "Goodwill—goodwill—and peace to all men."

E. Vere.

JUSQU'AU REVOIR.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc., etc.

Stealing a Glance at the World.

THE time was drawing near for Osman's departure and we thought of it with keen regret. He had prolonged his stay into weeks, and those hours and days had been some of the pleasantest in our remembrance. For once the malignant crossness of events had been stayed in our favour; Fate was kindly in throwing us together; accidentally as it appeared: only that with James Beauchamp one feels inclined to say that nothing happens by chance or accident. The almost daily events of life seem to contradict this theory; but we who cannot see beyond the veil; cannot see the end from the beginning of any single chapter of existence; may well assume that the apparent chances of life are all designed incidents, bearing upon a given purpose and termination: each event the separate sections of a puzzle one day to become a perfect whole. If Nature worked by violent means, the machinery of the world would soon be out of joint. There is no jarring in the wheels which keep the universe on its way. The turning of a straw appears very often to influence the whole life for good or ill; and we know that no single life is regulated by mere straws. Nothing is truer than that Providence works by small means to great ends.

"I am recalled and I must go. My presence in Constantinople has become a necessity," said Osman. "I lament my departure. Never has Cairo so charmed me; never have days passed so swiftly. My only consolation is that what has been may be again. You will

come to me in Constantinople; and, indeed, in what spot of this fair globe might we not meet, when I shake myself free of diplomacy and am able to roam at will?"

Our time for departure was also drawing near. Another week, and we should have turned from Cairo and all its wonders with infinite sorrow: though far less than if Osman had remained. He had still three days before him; we six.

"I wish we could have travelled together," he said. "Nay, you might even have accompanied me as far as Constantinople, and continued your way through Austria. One week with me, and you should have been as much at home as I myself."

This also was impossible. H.'s leave of absence was drawing to an end; in forming our plans we had allowed only sufficient time for the homeward journey.

"That shall be our last recollection of Cairo!" cried Osman. "We will have a day in the desert, with nothing but the solitude and breadth and repose of nature around us. I will arrange it all, and it shall be to-morrow. Be with me at nine o'clock and our horses and attendants shall be ready. We will go to the Petrified Forest, and pass into the Valley of Wanderings; and take our luncheon at Moses' well, in the shelter and shadow of that great amphitheatre of rocks which seems to match so well those desert solitudes. Bring nothing with you but yourselves: the attendants shall carry our nectar and ambrosia."

We had been spending the evening together; an arrangement which had become a recognised law five days out of the seven. It was drawing towards the hour of separation; and a remark of H.'s about the Petrified Forest: as to which species the fossil remains belonged, and comparing the sandstone of the Mokattam hills with the meiocene of Farafra with its bubbling springs: had caused Osman suddenly to exclaim that we would go and see these things for ourselves.

A day in the desert, with Osman as guide, philosopher and friend, seemed the perfection of human enjoyment; and the matter was no sooner proposed than arranged.

The next morning was bright and clear as usual, the skies were blue, the air was sparkling: everything was favourable to our enterprise. Punctually at nine o'clock we found ourselves with Osman. The horses in the courtyard—small, thoroughbred Arabians of the greatest beauty—awaited our arrival, impatiently pawing the stone pavement. In a very few moments we had started, three attendants on horseback following.

We went quickly up the Mouskee, and turning sharply to the left, passed out of Cairo by the Bab en-Nasr: the "Gate of the Help of God," near the great Mohammedan cemetery. The ancient city wall, running westward, formerly connected this gate with the Bab el-Futûh, or Gate of Victory; and both gates were

constructed upon the lines of an old Roman castle, built on the ruins of Fostât by Cambyses, in the sixth century B.C., when New Babylon was founded where Old Cairo now stands; afterwards, it may be remembered, the head-quarters of one of the three Roman legions stationed in Egypt when that people occupied the Lotus-Land.

It has been well said that every footstep in Cairo awakens some historical fact or record of more than ordinary interest.

We turned to the right, skirting the wonderful tombs of the Caliphs, and passing under the very shadow of the Tomb-Mosque of Barkook. To our left rose the remarkable Gebel el-Ahmar or Red Mountain, its inexhaustible quarries supplying building material from the earliest ages; and from which the two musical statues of Thebes are said to have been taken. Here, too, many fossils have been found. The romance of the spot has been broken by a railway, which carries away to the world the products of the quarries. Further to the right rose the Mokattam range. We looked back upon the minarets of the Tombs of the Caliphs and our thoughts naturally took the same direction, without any touch of mesmerism.

"Do you remember that night, and our wonderful moonlight experience?" said Osman. "Had you ever met with anything like it before—or since?"

It was a difficult question. Our moonlight visions at the Great Pyramid had not possessed the intricate details, the refined delicacy of these Tombs of the Caliphs; but for grandeur, simple majesty of outline, silence and solitude, everything that appeals to the heart of man, perhaps nothing on earth could equal those Royal Tombs of Gizeh.

We were now passing into another matchless but very different solitude: the outskirts of the mighty Sahara, with all its untold possibilities. Before us lay a wide, pathless world; an ocean of desert country; sandy plains stretching to right and left. It happened that we were alone. Of the numberless inhabitants of Cairo, none had chosen that day for visiting the Petrified Forest; or it might be that we were too early for them. All the charms of the wilderness took possession of us. We might have been starting on a long journey to Mount Sinai, where the tables of the Law were delivered to Moses, and Elijah found refuge after the priests of Baal had been slain at the brook Kishon. Such a journey could not be done under a fortnight; or even more if much time was spent at the Monastery of St. Catherine. Here in the early days the Christians settled, far from the world and mankind; monks and recluses in good earnest, existing amidst these rocky mountains, whose hidden springs of water quenched their thirst; locusts and wild-honey and an almost barren vegetation scarcely satisfying hunger. They might well suppose that here they would be left in peace to worship in their own way, and escape persecution. But even here fanaticism found them out, and we read of raids, massacres and abominable cruelties.

A Young Cairene.

Beasts of prey will spare each other, but man is less merciful to man.

"It would be a charming excursion," said Osman. "I took it many years ago with my father, and the impression is as vividly with me to-day as then. I can conceive how you would enjoy it—how thoroughly we should enjoy it together."

The Convent of St. Catherine, he added, existed under the very shadow of the Mount of Moses. The visitor passed out by the garden of the institution, and by a well-indicated path commenced the ascent of this chain of rocky mountains. Various excursions led to ruined monasteries, to small oases where water fresh and clear is for ever found; to a chapel dedicated to Elijah and Elisha; to the small cave 500 feet above the monastery, in which Elijah is said to have lived until all danger to his life was over: as described in the First Book of Kings.

"Almost as poorly fed as Elijah then was are the monks of the monastery to-day," said Osman. "It is an irregular, straggling pile of buildings, 5000 feet above the sea, strongly protected by massive walls. There are rooms set apart for pilgrims and visitors, who may stay here, as long as they care to do so, contributing a small sum towards their humble fare; very humble if they bring no supplies with them. A long wooden gallery opens to these rooms, which are close to the cells of the monks. Here they breathe air that is worth a king's ransom and keeps life in them to a far old age, in spite of fasts and privations."

"Are they as strict in their observances as other monastic orders?" H. asked.

"Much more so," replied Osman, "considering how few are their temptations to frivolity and dissipation, the thousand-and-one small sins and errors that earnest men and women, bravely fighting life's battle in the world, meet with every day and overcome. They take neither meat nor wine. Meat indeed would be an impossible luxury in the centre of the great desert. Oil is forbidden during their fasts, which occur frequently. Fish is permitted; and also a liqueur made from dates—the latter in small quantities. Perhaps that is wise—for it is very good. They assemble for prayer four times in the twenty-four hours, twice during the silent watches of the night. Long slumbers and self-indulgence are not for them. Once women were not admitted within the monastery walls, but that rule has been abolished: a happy thing for lady travellers who venture so far: the next shelter is a very long ride from St. Catherine's."

"Is it anything of an oasis?" we asked. "Do trees and flowers and fruits flourish there?"

"Indeed yes," returned Osman, "and in great abundance. Within the walls surrounding the monastery cypress and other trees are found, whilst flowers and evergreens do their best to turn this barren spot into a wilderness that blossoms as the rose. Vines

On the Nile.

and apricots grow upon the sunny walls, and bear good fruit. The monastery is a curious building. Narrow irregular passages meet one everywhere; and a guide is needed to pilot one through the numberless courts enclosed within the walls. Everything bears the mark of antiquity. All might almost have existed in the time of Moses; and near at hand is the well at which Moses is said to have watered the flocks of Jethro's daughters. The garden itself is enclosed in high walls and marked out in terraces. Every sort of fruit tree flourishes: magnificent almonds, apricots, apples, pears, plums, figs, olives: what you will. The climate is so splendid that only a little water is needed to make the earth abundantly productive."

"I think I will turn monk," laughed H., "and join this earthly paradise. May the monks eat of their own fruits?"

"Yes; each has his portion. Vegetables are scarcer, though one would think more necessary. But things flourish better above the ground than in the ground or upon its surface. After a few years' residence on Mount Sinai some of the monks return to their homes, and are ranked as martyrs."

"An easy martyrdom," laughed H. "A few years of repose; enjoyment of the best fruits of the earth; penances no doubt largely mixed with indulgences; a sea-watch division of time: and then canonisation. I think we will go on and try the experience of St. Catherine's."

Not for us to-day this experience; no pilgrimage into the wilderness, for which we longed earnestly as we had ever desired the voyage of the Nile. Longed for the wonderful solitude and desolation; the lonely communing with Nature; all the grandeur of these immense plains which seem boundless almost as eternity: the vision of those wonderful oases, where hidden springs for ever flow, and, surrounded by an ocean of sand, white and dazzling, the eye falls with a relief only known to those who have experienced it, upon rich vegetation: emerald green plains on which palm groves throw their long and grateful shadows. Some are surrounded by rocky undulations, which help to fertilise these cultivated spots, and sometimes hide them until the traveller is close upon them, so that almost in a moment he passes from the depths of despair to a very Eden of delight. But these are the small oases. The larger oases stretch over a great tract of desert. In many of them, the Dead Sea fruit grows on trees about six feet high. But crops good for food are also found here: such as rice, wheat and barley; the date-palm in abundance, and of a superior sort; olive and other fruit trees: besides cotton and indigo in smaller quantities. Thus these rare spots are oases indeed. Of the animals that roam there are few excepting the gazelle, the jackal, and the fox.

Our journey to-day would be limited to the Petrified Forest and its surroundings; but even this would give us a foretaste of what the more remote plains of the desert yield to the traveller: delights

which Osman had frequently experienced and described with all the magic of his eloquence.

The river divides the deserts; the Arabian from the Nubian. Here ages ago passed out a great multitude in the dead of night, after spoiling the Egyptians. Here the children of Israel began their forty years' wandering under Moses; waxing impatient and idolatrous; gathering manna day by day; their wants miraculously supplied; delivered out of the hand of generations of oppressors; with every reason for rejoicing; yet constantly thrown back by discontent and unrighteousness.

Away we galloped this morning, perhaps in the very track of the Israelites of old; Cairo and its civilisation soon left behind us. Our very horses seemed to rejoice in the freedom of the desert, and scoured the plains as if distant Sinai had been the end of their ambition. Before long we were surrounded by the vast stretches and undulations of the wilderness. Very far off, we still saw the Citadel of Cairo and the Mosque of Mohammed Ali rising heavenwards; vague as a dream; a dim foundationless outline that would presently dissolve and disappear.

Onwards yet, until nothing but long reaches of tableland met the view; low sand-hills, waves upon waves of arid plains, a rocky stratum of limestone witnessing to the barren earth. Far away in the interior, we come to rich ranges of mountains stretching westward, broadening as they advance, until they reach the Nile at Assooan. These mountains, rising to a height of 6000 feet above the sea, are rich in granite, porphyry, serpentine marble, and other products, including alabaster and gypsum. In the Arabian desert, too, you light upon ravines and precipices, which might be made productive, if not so far out of the world.

And some of these oases are largely inhabited. The Great Oasis of El-Khargeh, for instance, has a population of over 6000. Its other name, Menamoon, signifies "the abode of Amen." Herodotus probably refers to it when writing of "a city seven days' journey from Thebes, called by the Greeks the Island of the Blessed."

Here the army of Cambyses halted on its way to the Oasis of Ammon, and perished in the desert.

The smaller oases used El-Khargeh as a city of refuge; and here Nestorius was banished after he had been condemned by the Council of Ephesus, in the year 435, dying in exile. It is the largest but not the most fertile of the oases: immense tracts of cultivation with wide stretches of barren sand between, extending in all for about ninety miles from north to south, and about twelve miles east to west.

"A hundred and fifty springs are said to water these fertile plains," said Osman, "specially rich in the date palm, whose trees exist in tens of thousands. In their season many of the caravans you meet are laden with the fruit of the oases which finds a ready sale in all Eastern towns, whose inhabitants look upon dates as their daily

bread. What more picturesque or poetical way of earning one's livelihood, than by cultivating the fruits of the earth? At night these wandering merchants repose under tents, rising before the sun, and resting again during the extreme heat of the day. How many a time have I not done the same!"

"But after all," H. observed, "the caravans you meet, the Arab encampments, are the exception, not the rule. The condition of the desert is silence, solitude, and desolation: a world waiting for its people. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied Osman; "owing to the vastness of the wilderness; for more people inhabit it than one might imagine. The history of Africa lies in the future. In the western Sahara, you will meet the fearless Arabs on their thoroughbred horses, now rushing like the very wind itself before an advancing sandstorm; now quietly pursuing their way to some distant town or to the banks of the Nile; now reposing day after day in tents in the midst of the desert; a small colony whose precise object for haunting that spot no one knows and no one ventures to inquire. At times they are open and frank enough, will give you shelter and take salt with you; at others, when they have secret and inscrutable plans in operation, they will be dumb as an oracle, silent as the grave. Their horses are their confidants, even as they possess their hearts; and, faithful creatures that they are—and beautiful as faithful—they never betray their masters."

A foretaste of this wild and charming life was ours to-day. Never before had we experienced or realised this desert solitude; as lost to the world as if days instead of hours had seen us travelling through the pathless wilderness. A wild freedom possessed our senses; the chains of life seemed to fall away; new and untold possibilities were on the eve of dawning; body and spirit were being gifted with wings, and we should control the air. Absolute calmness and repose surrounded us like an atmosphere. The lesser troubles of life here had no place. A lightness of heart fell upon us such as we had never enjoyed in our happiest moments. It seemed possible to embrace the whole world of delight, thought and sensation, in one glance of the eye, one outstretching of the arms. Heart beat and pulses quickened as the horses galloped madly over hill and plain, and, for all one could see, might gallop for ever. This was life indeed, and one longed for a succession of days and nights in these wild and boundless solitudes.

We passed through sandy wastes, hot and glistening in the sunshine. Never was sky so blue and brilliant, so ethereal and celestial, as the sky above us. This alone must have made one intensely happy. We could almost see the sparkling air with its wonderful luminous bloom as we neared the beautiful Mokattam range. A yellowish hill stood at the mouth of a narrow winding valley or gorge, and over a broken path of loose stones we ascended for more than a mile to where the rocky pass opened out in a bold

FLYING FROM A SAND-STORM IN THE DESERT.

and imposing amphitheatre. Here flourished a strange and solitary fig-tree enclosed in a wall built as a shelter from the wind by the quarrymen who once worked here. And here we found Moses' spring or well, as it is called : a small rivulet of water flowing from a cleft in the rock. It is more than probable that the spring did not exist in the days of Moses, but was brought to life by the labours of the quarrymen. The water was bitter as the waters of Marah, and even our horses would have none of it. But the water varies, and there are times when its brackishness disappears for a season. The gorge was full of fossils and desert plants.

Here we halted, and Osman consulted his watch.

"It is yet early," he said. "If you are equal to it, we might push on to the Great Petrified Forest, for rest and luncheon. Our horses are swift, and the exhilaration of flying over these sandy wastes forbids all sense of fatigue. We shall reach the so-called forest in an hour and a half, or less. Even then it will scarcely be noon; we shall have two good hours for rest and roaming; and you will become a little more acquainted with these desert solitudes. Let us first take a glance at the lesser Petrified Forest, so that you may know what to expect from the greater."

Passing down the gorge to the yellow hill, we turned to the right and continued our way to the foot of the range, presently reaching a black, glazed-looking rock, with lower hills opposite where Osman pointed out some curious oyster-fossils. Fossils, indeed, seem to be the condition of these regions, which ought to be the delight of antiquarians and geologists. Immediately beyond these hills was the Petrified Forest.

At the first moment we felt rather bewildered. We had heard of the wood that could not be seen for the trees, but here we found neither wood nor trees. If we had thought much about the matter, it was to expect a forest, more or less extensive, of trees standing and turned to stone by the flight of time, the action of the atmosphere and other causes : antiquities from the hand of Nature as wonderful and well-preserved as antiquities from the hand of man in the Boulak Museum. Happily, the desert itself with all its charms, the emotions it aroused, was a thousand times sufficient recompense for our day's excursion; but those to whom these wild and vast solitudes do not appeal, will scarcely find the Petrified Forest any reward for their trouble.

Yet they are considered one of the wonders of Egypt, these remains which strew the sand in the neighbourhood of the Mokattam hills. Black fragments of wood turned to stone were lying about : fragments fast disappearing under the hand of tourists and fossil-collectors. All seem to belong to one species of tree, allied to the cotton plant or balsam, but of a gigantic size unknown in the present day. The whole question is involved in mystery. It is doubtful whether in remote ages the trees grew here, or whether they were floated up by

EGYPTIAN COFFEE HOUSE.

water. If the former, then this part of the desert must have changed very much in character in the course of time: the rolling away of century on century. As records of a long past age, these fossils were interesting, but they were mere petrified fragments, not a forest.

"You are surprised," said Osman. "You expected much more than you find. In fact you find nothing. Nothing but a few black pieces of wood turned to stone, which, as they do not grow like mushrooms, will very soon disappear. And these remnants of what must once have been a forest, here or elsewhere, are only interesting as fossils. In other parts of the great desert such remains are also found—are even embedded in the sandstone rock, proving that thousands of years ago Nature was passing through a state of transition resulting in what we now see. Huge trunks strew the Little Kashab for many miles. As the rock crumbled away in the course of ages, the roots, loosened and detached, scattered themselves over the surface of the plains. The fossils around us have very much the appearance of coal. Every one who comes here carries away a specimen, and the forest will soon become a tradition."

There was little need to linger. The fossils were certainly curious as specimens of the hardening effect of time upon a substance originally soft: as witness to the march of time itself: but there it ended: and not to "censure others by the dignity of excelling," we put small examples into our pockets as memorials of our visit. Then we turned to what was infinitely more full of charm: the great plains of the desert. A short gallop across the plateau brought us to the southern slopes of the Mokattam hills, where by means of a narrow path we turned into the "Valley of Wanderings." The view was magnificent, almost painful from its very length and breadth.

"There in the far distance you see rising the hills of Tura with their vast quarries, lying on the very edge of the sea," said Osman. "Long ago I inspected them all: subterranean caverns, chambers and passages, which have existed for thousands of years, for they were formed in the days of the Pharaohs. Nothing daunted the ancient Egyptians, who were not afraid of darkness or evil spirits. The Arabs, on the contrary, fear darkness, and will only quarry on the surface. Even from here you can see the outlines of what was once a powerful fortress. No quarries in Egypt are more interesting: the only example at all approaching them is the Red Mountain we passed on our way this morning, which is both worthy and easy of inspection. The stone from the quarries of Tura is said to have furnished the outer casing for the Great Pyramids. Even now, you may see in these halls and chambers how the ancients carved and quarried: and no workman of the present day surpasses them in accuracy and finish. I visited these quarries years ago with my father. We spent a whole week here, and day after day I used to lie on the slopes, reading, dreaming, overlooking the lovely changing waters, watching the boats as they glided by

with their white sails, taking no account of time, satisfied with the happiness of the present, giving little thought to the future. That," he added, "has been one of my rules of life: or perhaps it is part of my mental bias, and has influenced me unconsciously. I have always lived in the present, allowing the future to look to itself; taking the full benefit of to-day without wishing for to-morrow. They who do so are wise, for they find at least twice as much in life as those who are always dating forward."

He pointed out a desert gorge between the hills; a gorge wild, desolate and severe, bounded by lofty precipices of rock; full of windings, communicating after many long miles with other and more remote ravines, stretching far away to Helwan, where you are once more in touch with civilisation, with streets and crowds and railways: influences which do their best to obliterate from one's memory all the charms of desert life.

"How well I remember one day in particular," continued Osman, "when I had left my father and gone up that majestic ravine without him. I wanted to be alone with all that grand severity; had risen at four o'clock and gone out upon the heights to enjoy the sunrise. I suppose I was tired, for throwing myself down in a sheltered spot, I unconsciously fell asleep and slept for four hours. I shall never forget my father's alarm, or his joy at seeing me return: and, good father and friend that he ever was, he never gave me a word of reproach. As a rule I never left him even for an hour, when we were travelling together: we were more like brothers than father and son: and I had been absent for eight hours when I returned. I never did it again, for he was then getting old, and, as far as I was concerned, was growing a little nervous. I was as the apple of his eye, and I think that my death would have been his own."

All this time we were scouring the plains out of sight of all trace of life and habitation. Nothing seemed to tire our horses, and the faster they went the more enjoyable was the motion. No ride we had ever taken could equal this ride in the desert. As Osman had said, a sense of fatigue was impossible. When we reached the Greater Petrified Forest we felt that we could have gone on until sundown unwearied.

Osman led the way to a quiet spot under a rock, where the advancing sun afforded little shade, though that little was grateful. Here for a couple of hours we encamped, feasted on Olympian fare, talked of times past and present, scenes and adventures we had met with; the turnings of straws which had influenced the current of our lives: all the mysterious, unseen influences which surround every one of us individually, and from which there is no escape.

The moments ran in golden sands; all was freedom, repose and sunshine; a new world, another state of existence. More than ever we wished for a longer spell of this enchantment; for days spent in travelling into the interior, and nights passed under the quiet

stars: ending in a sojourn at the monastery of St. Catherine, and long interviews with the monks, during which we might learn their views of life and death, seclusion and penance: and discover how far their narrow existence advanced them towards the perfection all desire and none attain to. We would take long walks up the Mount of Moses, and inspect the ruined temples, the crumbling mosque the devotion of Mohammedans once raised here: and in visiting the haunts of those holy men of old, it might be that something of the patience of Moses and the mantle of Elijah might fall upon us.

But St. Catherine's was far off: we were not to see it; perhaps shall never see it: yet mentally we picture that small religious oasis where the rising and setting of the sun alone mark the days; and the death of an aged monk is the sole tragedy which breaks in upon the even tenour of this little fraternity, over which the sun shines, and the rain falls in its season, and the stars look down in nightly benediction.

The hour glass was turned, and too soon the golden sands ran out again: we could not stay here for ever. But in returning we took our time, and did not travel as the arrow flies. Refreshed by a long rest we spent hours in the delight of scouring sandy plains and passing over hills and undulations. During the whole time we saw no sign of living creature; not so much as a jackal, fox, or gazelle. The latter, indeed, with its graceful form and soft black eye, we wished for, but they are found more in the interior, and, in their extreme timidity, seldom venture so near the haunts of men. Once only in the distance we saw a file of camels, heavily laden, plodding towards Cairo.

"A caravan!" cried Osman: "let us meet them and inquire whence they come and whither they go."

Our horses were not long in reaching them, and we found they were merchants from Jedda, laden with mother-of-pearl, coffee, essential oils, and silken stuffs. The merchants were enveloped in long cloaks, and little was seen of their faces excepting the eyes, as a protection from the sun. Osman spoke to them in their own language, and what he said had the effect of causing an immediate halt. They uncovered their faces, made profound Eastern salutations, and placed themselves and all they possessed at his service. Handsome, stalwart men, with dark flashing eyes and patriarchal countenances. Some had grey beards, but the burden of years sat lightly upon them; they seemed as strong, as well able to bear fatigue, as those who were only entering manhood.

"You have had a long journey," remarked Osman. "I thought that there were now easier ways of transporting goods and precious stones from Jedda to Cairo and the outer world."

Then they explained that they were pilgrims as well as merchants. They had made a pilgrimage to Mecca, nearly fifty miles to

ENTRANCE GATE TO BAZAARS.

the west of Jedda, and had vowed to cross the desert on foot. Nothing, however, prevented them from making it at the same time a matter of business: and so it came to pass that they were now approaching Cairo and the end of their journey. After a short conversation they once more set out towards the great city, and we watched their slow and patient progress as they stood out in picturesque file against the sky, until the undulations of the plains hid them from view.

So it came to pass that towards the decline of the afternoon we found ourselves still in the desert, on the top of the Mokattam hills, surrounded by a wide and wonderful view. Behind us the great desert, in which we had just spent one of the pleasantest days of our lives: before us, the visible signs, almost sounds, of the great city, overshadowed by its splendid citadel and the mosque which crowned it; on the one hand the windings of the Nile, with the Great Pyramids beyond. The sun went down and we found ourselves still upon the hills, at the ruined mosque of Giyûshi. Cairo lay at our feet, bathed in splendour. Everything was tinged with the flush of sunset. The sky shot forth colours indescribably brilliant; the whole earth reflected the glory of the heavens. The majestic, slow-moving river was for the moment turned to blood-red, whilst the Great Pyramids had changed the grey tones of antiquity for the loveliest, most inappropriate colours of the blush-rose. The minarets of the Citadel Mosque seemed on fire; everything suggested the contrast of life and death; in these buildings, decay, the heritage of time; and in the sun and sky an emblem of the Resurrection and of eternal youth.

Alas, time would not stand still; for us it sped all too quickly, and before another sun had twice risen and set, we found ourselves at the railway station, bidding Osman a melancholy farewell.

"You have promised to come and stay with me," he said. "I hold a promise sacred; it must be so with you. Do not delay, for life is full of uncertainties. Here we have spent delightful days, but there I am even more at home. No door closed to the world shall be closed to you: and no wish you may have shall be unfulfilled. You will come too," he added to H. "We deal in magic, you know."

The rare magic of friendship and influence, of sympathy and a kindly nature, combined with singular mental powers, a profound knowledge of mankind; the charm of unbounded wealth and an exalted station: this magic he possessed and exercised as it has been given to few.

The last moment arrived; the train slowly moved; the station-master and a small group of attendants stood in the background. Osman's pale, powerful, yet sympathetic Greek face was framed in the open window.

"Adieu," we said, as the carriage moved slowly onwards.

"*Jusqu'au revoir*," he replied.

A few moments more, and the train was out of sight. We turned back into Cairo, whose streets for us now seemed empty and deserted.

Our own sojourn in the Lotus-Land was drawing to a close. Three

Small Egyptian Eating-House, Cairo.

more risings of the sun, and we too should have passed away from Cairo with all its charms and attractions.

One of our last excursions must be recorded in few words.

H. wished to visit an ostrich farm, and this, combined with a visit to the Obelisk of Heliopolis, was easily arranged. The time was

the day after Osman's departure. The splendid little Arabian horses had been placed at our disposal for the remainder of our stay : a graceful act of which we did not avail ourselves. This would probably be our last excursion, and we thought we should like to become better acquainted with the donkeys of Cairo, as inseparable from the city as its bazaars and mosques, the very Nile itself. Therefore our dragoman was commissioned to exercise his skill and choose with discretion. He alone rejoiced in the departure of Osman, which reinstated him in pomp and power. Aleck loved to command.

It was a bright, clear morning; the skies were not in sympathy with Osman's departure, and that Cairo was so much the poorer. The air was sparkling and exhilarating; no one could indulge in the luxury of a melancholy mood under its influence. Our donkeys were full of life and animation ; as we have said before, one soon grows used to the action of these Eastern animals ; and they are so strong and willing that there are those—we were not of the number—who prefer them to horses.

We found ourselves trotting through the streets of Cairo, charging as it were the citadel, which loomed ahead of us, crowned by its ever-memorable mosque. We passed straight up the crowded Mouskee, and Aleck went before us, clearing the way; very much in his element. Voice and whip had no rest; and again we trembled for consequences which never happened. Remonstrance was useless. But every now and then some ludicrous incident would occur which convinced us that with all his despotic propensities a certain love of humour in our dragoman redeemed the apparent sternness of his character. The truth was, in his small way he was a philosopher ; he knew the nature of those with whom he had to deal; experience had taught him what he had to do and how far he had to go: the limits seemed to us beyond the bounds of discretion, but he knew better: the end always justified the means. Before the day was over we discovered that he had brought us this round-about way for the sole purpose of commanding the loiterers in the Mouskee.

As usual, it was crowded with a motley gathering of Easterns and Europeans: the latter often suffering by contrast. The entrance to the bazaars was of course impassable ; the streets were full of cries ; the money-changers at the corners seemed unusually lively and full of work. The calm Citadel looked down in dignified silence upon the scene, and its Mosque reminded the world that it was hastening to the silent land. We listened for the voice of the Muezzin, but it was not the hour of prayer: the minarets sent forth no warning. It was a relief to pass out of the noisy thoroughfares and by a long *détour* which really made us angry with our dragoman, turn into the direct road for Shoobra, Heliopolis, and the Ostrich Farm.

Down the long, straight road, through long avenues of trees, out into the open country. Crossing some rough, desert-like

fields, where the plough had been at work, and putting to flight a number of cruel-looking vultures—the first we had seen in the neighbourhood of Cairo—we reached a long, narrow embankment over which our donkeys scrambled with a certain amount of effort. Another mile of flat, loose, rugged, sandy waste, which tried the patience of our animals, and we saw rising before us, a large enclosure; a sort of straggling bungalow or wooden shanty: the whole very much like a zoological settlement in the desert.

The ostriches themselves were in a circular erection divided into sections; each section containing its complement of birds, old and young. Altogether there seemed an enormous number, but all had plenty of space for moving. Some every now and then darted off from one end of their "beat" to the other with the speed of the wind, whilst others would come and look at us through the grating with wide, startled eyes, as if they would have turned us into martyrs with the greatest pleasure. Strong and powerful are these ostriches both in the wing and the leg. Few creatures can equal them in speed, and they never tire; whilst a kick from one of them is not easily forgotten. They are stupid, as every one knows, and no one will wonder at, when he sees the small head; and they can be excessively cruel, perhaps as much from shyness and fear as from natural tendency. Very curious they looked as they stalked about, with their long legs, round, egg-shaped bodies and crane-like necks, their heads constantly in the attitude of intense listening, as if for ever on their guard against an unseen enemy. The feathers which make these birds so valuable adorn them far less than they do the fair heads they ultimately decorate. A great source of industry and a lucrative, are these ostrich farms, but few and small compared with those of South Africa, where the birds are presented with "the freedom of the country," and roam at will, yet are seldom lost. The office of the farm had a collection of eggs and feathers for sale sufficient to have supplied all the fashionable milliners of Paris and all the head-dresses for many a Queen's Drawing-room.

From this we turned back across the ploughed fields, over the embankment, and on to the high road again, where through magnificent avenues of trees, and past gardens laden with fruit trees and brilliant with flowers, we reached the village of Matariyeh, with its garden containing the Virgin's tree: a sycamore now old and covered with names, beneath which the Virgin is said to have rested with the Holy Child during the flight into Egypt. But the original tree came to an end two centuries ago, when the present tree was planted. It flourishes therefore, like the Papal See, by right of succession.

The garden, luxuriant and fertile, is well watered by a reservoir supplied by springs, the only water in the neighbourhood good for drinking. The reservoir is called the "Water of An," and is mentioned in Coptic legends of great antiquity. Here once

flourished the balsam plant from which was made the celebrated balm of Gilead given by Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. And here was first grown the cotton plant, destined to become so great an article of commerce in our Lotus-Land.

Soon after this we came to the ruins of Heliopolis, the famous "City of the Sun," that played so great a part in the religion of Ancient Egypt.

Here was the temple of Ra or Tum, a deity appearing under seventy-five different forms, each form having its own special attribute, Tum being the evening sun, Harmachis the morning sun. The place was also called An, or Benna, the House of Phœnix, identical with the Hebrew On, mentioned in the Bible.

The sun temple of Ra in fame and antiquity came next to the temple of Ptah in Memphis, and its ceremonies were even more prolonged and gorgeous than those of the temple of the Apis bull. The two temples, however, were intimately connected. The Mnevis bull of Heliopolis was sacred to Ra; and the Apis bull of Memphis, sacred to Ptah, had its abode in Heliopolis until it was transferred to Memphis. Its college of priests was more celebrated than all others, one of the priests being Potiphar, whose daughter, Asnath, Joseph married. Herodotus declares that the sages of Heliopolis were the most learned in the world.

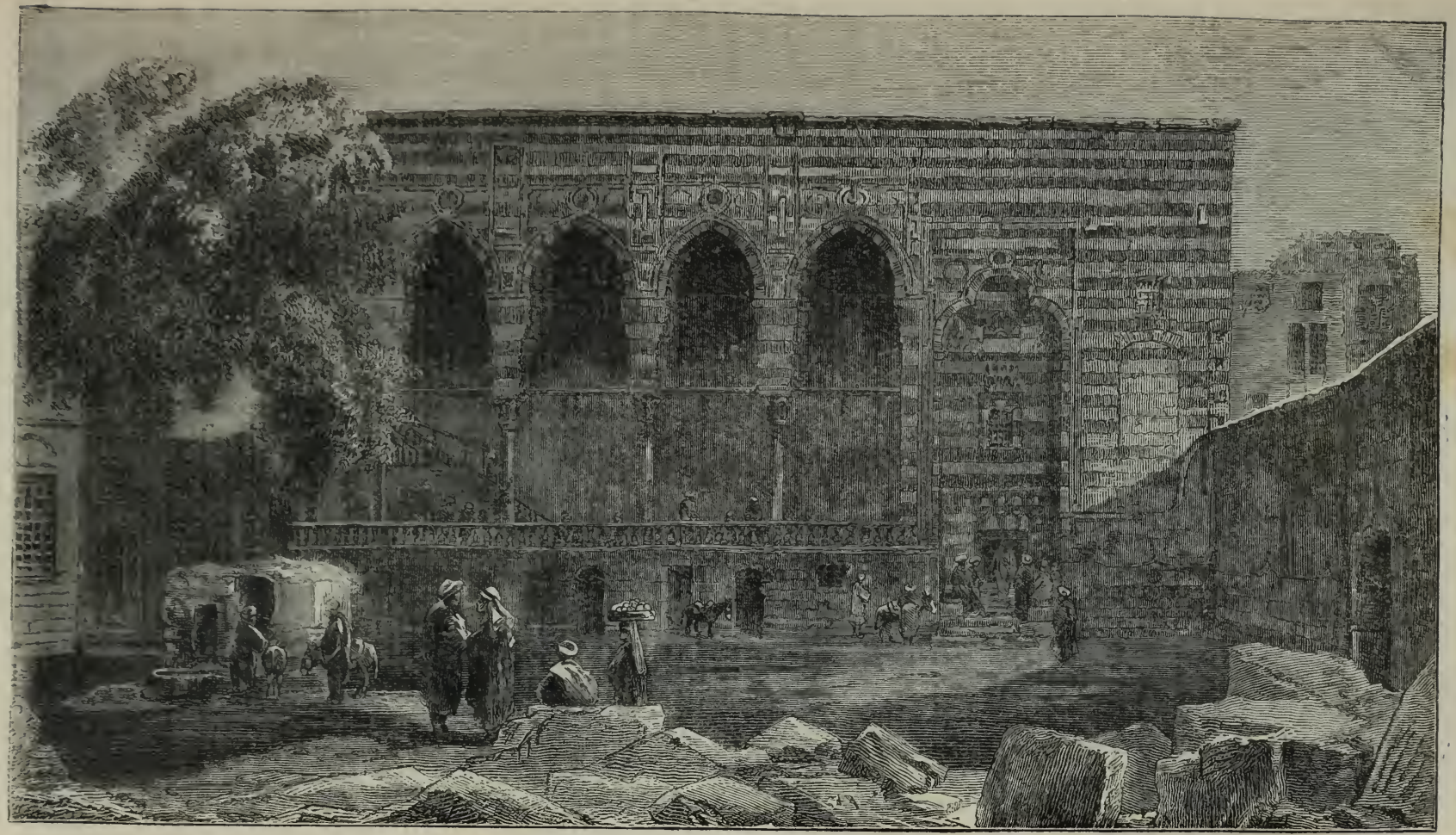
Of the ruins of this great city, these mighty temples, nothing remains excepting the obelisk; the oldest in Egypt.

This once stood, with its lost companion, in front of the entrance to the temple. Before them was a long avenue of sphinxes; and nothing more dignified and imposing, or better suited to the country in grandeur and simple outlines, can be imagined.

The obelisk was erected in the reign of Osirtasen, second king of the twelfth or Theban dynasty, some three thousand years before the Christian era. Its long inscription, written in the character of the old empire, is repeated on all four sides.

There are still remains of mounds and brick walls to be seen, so much the colour of the surrounding sand that at the first moment it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. These ruined walls marked an enclosure of some five thousand feet, supposed to have been the vast open space in front of the temple dedicated to sacred uses.

As a remnant of antiquity, this Obelisk of Heliopolis is one of the most interesting objects in the Lotus-Land, and once more when gazing upon it, we are brought into touch with all that grand past history and people of whose study there literally seems to be no end. The deeper we dive into the history of Egypt, the more profound become its truths, the more magnificent the foundations on which they built up their glorious kingdom, their complicated and beautiful, though heathen faith. Vaster than any people's that have since followed were their conceptions; their minds seemed limitless as



COURT OF A HOUSE IN CAIRO.

their great deserts, and their efforts steadfast as the course of their sacred river. The country remains and the river flows on ; but of the nation which grew and grew in power as hundreds of years rolled downwards into thousands, there remains only a record and a name.

The sun was overhead as we turned our backs upon Heliopolis ; the obelisk threw no shadow, hot and barren were the plains, the mounds and the ruined brick walls. The gardens looked cool and delightful as we passed them ; many of their walls were loaded with creepers of gorgeous bloom which trailed for long distances and fell gracefully, rivalling the hanging gardens of the Hesperides. The shady avenues were a grateful repose after the glare of the cloudless Eastern sky. We passed through the fashionable drive of Cairo, but it was still early, and the roads were deserted.

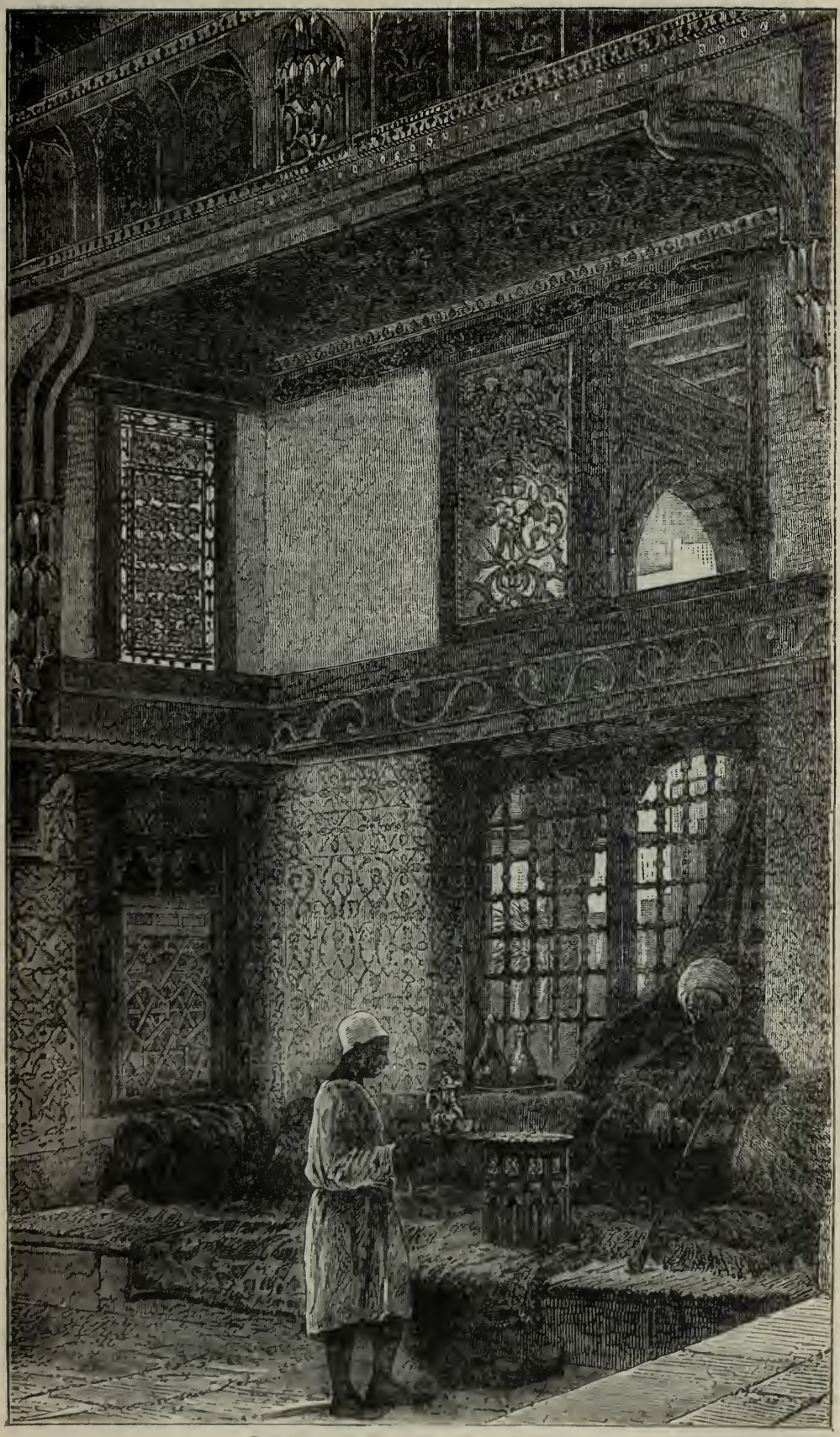
The afternoon of that same day, we had dismissed our donkeys, and were walking through some of the streets of the city, feeling that we should soon look upon them no more, when entering one of the quieter thoroughfares given up to large houses with gardens enclosed in high walls, we came upon what apparently was a festive scene. A certain house was decorated and adorned with drapery and lanterns, especial care being bestowed upon the doorway. A small crowd stood outside surrounding a brass band, which sent forth its harsh and peculiar Egyptian music. We asked the meaning of this excitement, and were informed that it was a marriage ; all this was part of the wedding festivity. As we passed the door, we halted an instant to gaze down the long wide passage decorated with drapery of some rich Eastern material. Flowers and evergreens also contributed their effect of colouring and freshness, and the whole arrangement was by no means unpicturesque.

At that moment a young man, none other than the bridegroom, simply dressed and very prepossessing, came forward, and seeing that we were strangers, politely asked us in. Apparently we were not expected to refuse, for he immediately turned and signed to us to follow.

Feeling suddenly placed under strange circumstances, but remembering that at Rome one should do as Rome does, we entered and accompanied our guide. Down a long wide passage draped and garlanded, until in a large courtyard we mounted some steps to a raised platform, where he ushered us to places of honour, a sort of canopy with a daïs. Seated round the platform or raised room, were richly dressed, venerable-looking men, several of whom were imposing and dignified sheykhs. These were all waiting the arrival of the bride, who might now be expected at any moment.

All rose as we entered, saluted us in Eastern fashion, and sat down again.

Laughter formed no part of the entertainment ; a few looked solemn and composed, as if assisting at funeral rather than marriage



RECESS IN HOUSE OF A SHEYKH.

rites, whilst others discoursed with great earnestness and animation. The bridegroom moved about from one to another, the most merry-looking and animated of all. Bashfulness and nervousness seemed unknown to him.

The scene was striking and novel. The raised room or kiosk—impromptu for the occasion—was splendidly decorated. Beyond it was the courtyard, where palms and small orange trees flourished, whilst flowers and garlands abounded. A small fountain sent forth its musical plash. Beyond rose another section of the same house, with mushrabeeyeh windows. An enormous mushrabeeyeh screen, forming, as it were, part of the wall, concealed from view what lay behind. Whether bright eyes were looking down upon us, more invisible than cloistered nuns, we could not tell. We would have given much for a glimpse of the bride, but might as well have wished for Aladdin's lamp. Even if she arrived before our departure, we should see nothing of her veiled features.

In a few minutes coffee was brought to us in cups with delicate filigree holders, and presented with great earnestness by the bridegroom himself.

Unfortunately everything had to be carried on by dumb motions: the assembled guests could not understand our language, nor we theirs. A few civilities we exchanged with the bridegroom, interpreted by our dragoman, but he was only able to divide his favours, and we limited our remarks to an earnest desire for his happiness. He laid his hand upon his heart, bowed, and smiled in such hopeful content, that we could only trust our wishes might add something to his felicity present and future.

One thing was evident: the courtesies of life were intended and were gracefully offered. Seeing us strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land, they had tendered us that hospitality which is a marked feature in the East. If there was anything singular in this invitation of the moment to two unknown wayfarers passing their gates, it was not for us to criticise, but to accept in the spirit of the offering. Evidently to refuse would have been to bring a regret upon the bright and amiable face of our passing host.

It might be, too, that some slight superstition was added to the hospitable thought, and that a refusal would have been equivalent to throwing a slight shadow upon the life of the bridal pair. Superstition is one of the foundation stones that build up the character of this people in whom many excellences dwell, and it is a weakness not to be disregarded until rooted out by reason and education. To respect the prejudices of others is one of the first laws not only of good breeding but of Christianity. Probably the most cultivated and enlightened amongst us has his own pet superstition deep down in his heart; it is, as Goethe says, a part of the very essence of humanity; and if it is not the vulgar turning of money at the new moon, or getting out of bed habitually on one side, or searching for a second magpie when

Light of the Harem.

one crosses our path, it may exist in some more profound and unsuspected phase, as closely clung to, as religiously observed, as the open superstition of the Arabian.

Suddenly there was a stir and commotion without; a wilder discord of music; a sound of carriages dashing up, of a crowd making way. The bride's procession had arrived; all rose to receive her.

The bridegroom went forward, nothing marking his emotion beyond a quickened footstep, a brighter eye.

Then the bride entered, followed by her maidens and relatives. She was closely veiled; more closely than usual; even the colour of her eyes could not be seen. These of course were dark and soft. The outline of her form could only be imagined; but she appeared tall and graceful, with a small, well-balanced head. We could therefore fancy her pretty, and that the fortunate bridegroom had secured a prize in the matrimonial market.

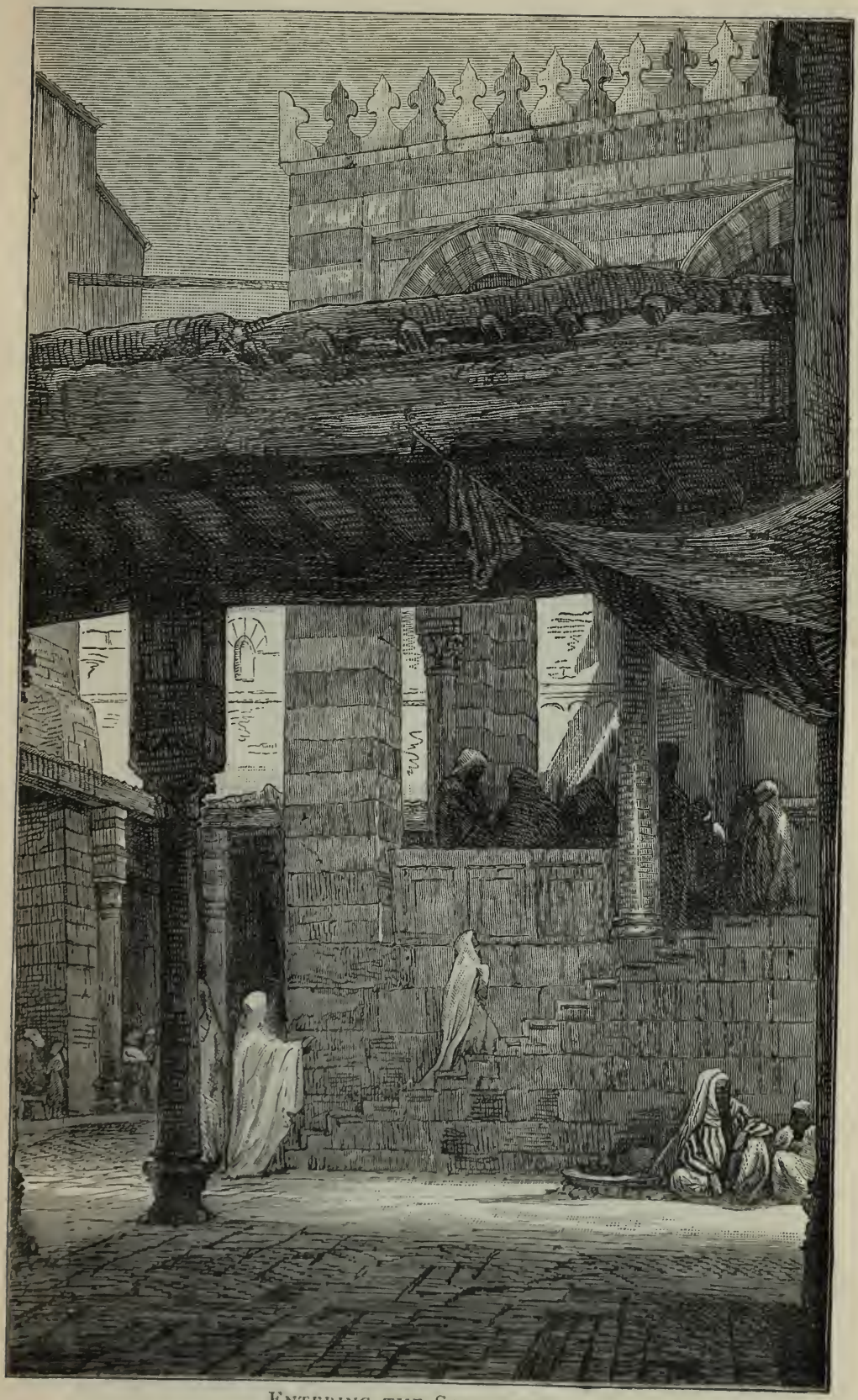
She did not mix with the bridegroom's friends. Slowly but without pausing, the bridal procession passed up the passage, and disappeared behind the large mushrabeeyeh screen, to the apartments dedicated to the harem. Here the bride would pass the remainder of the day in quietude and silence, with downcast eyes, spoken to by her friends and not replying, until one by one they would depart and leave her with no other attendant than her old duenna.

The bridegroom and his friends during this time would be enjoying each other's society. Presently a banquet would be served, followed by coffee and cigarettes, and at the hour of prayer, all would repair to the Mosque with lighted torches and tapers: after which the day's ceremonial would close.

But long before this we had taken our departure: as soon, indeed, as the bride's procession had disappeared within the seclusion of the harem.

With a final expression of our wishes for the happiness of our young host, we bade him farewell. He accompanied us down the garlanded passage, and as he had received us at his threshold, so there he bade us God-speed, shaking hands in a fashion more English than Oriental. To us it was a very pleasant incident, resulting in a momentary glimpse of one of the most important ceremonies and customs of this people, and yielding a happy remembrance for the time to come.

It was also one of our closing impressions of the Lotus-Land; one of the last Eastern pictures that gilded our path. And so it was well that it should be of a sunny nature, with so much in it that was of human interest. There had been something especially winning in the young bridegroom: and somehow one felt that if all the nice people of earth could be turned into Positives and placed in one hemisphere, and all the opposite became Negatives and were placed in the other, the happier region would not be an empty paradise.



ENTERING THE SANCTUARY.

But for this consummation, devoutly to be wished, we must await the millennium.

And so the hour rang out when we too must bid farewell to the City of the Pyramids; when we took our last pilgrimage to the Citadel, and looked for the last time upon that wonderful panorama which embraces so many objects sacred to History, Religion, and Antiquity, without which the world would be so infinitely the poorer.

Before us the numberless mosques and minarets, in which we had delighted, towered above the streets and houses of Cairo, gilded and glorified by the declining sun; again the waters of the sacred Nile changed to blood red, and those marvels of Gizeh wore the tint of the blush-rose. These sunsets are the rule, not the exception in this Lotus-Land. Behind us, rising in unearthly vision, the slender minarets of Mohammed Ali were landmarks pointing heavenwards even to the far-off desert plains. The voice of the Muezzin rang out clear and distinct upon the startled air: "Allah! Allah! Allah! There is no God but God!" At our feet, in the pure and exquisite ruins of the Tombs of the Caliphs, the dead slept in surroundings that almost make death itself beautiful. Here on a certain night already long past, we had revelled in a moonlight scene unparalleled upon earth for chasteness and refinement: a scene the more memorable for the new-found friend who had sailed before us for the classic shores of the Bosphorus. But in Friendship, as in its twin sister Love, there is a talisman which laughs at time; one day becomes as a thousand years; and the new friendship seems only the friendship of some previous existence taken up where it had been interrupted.

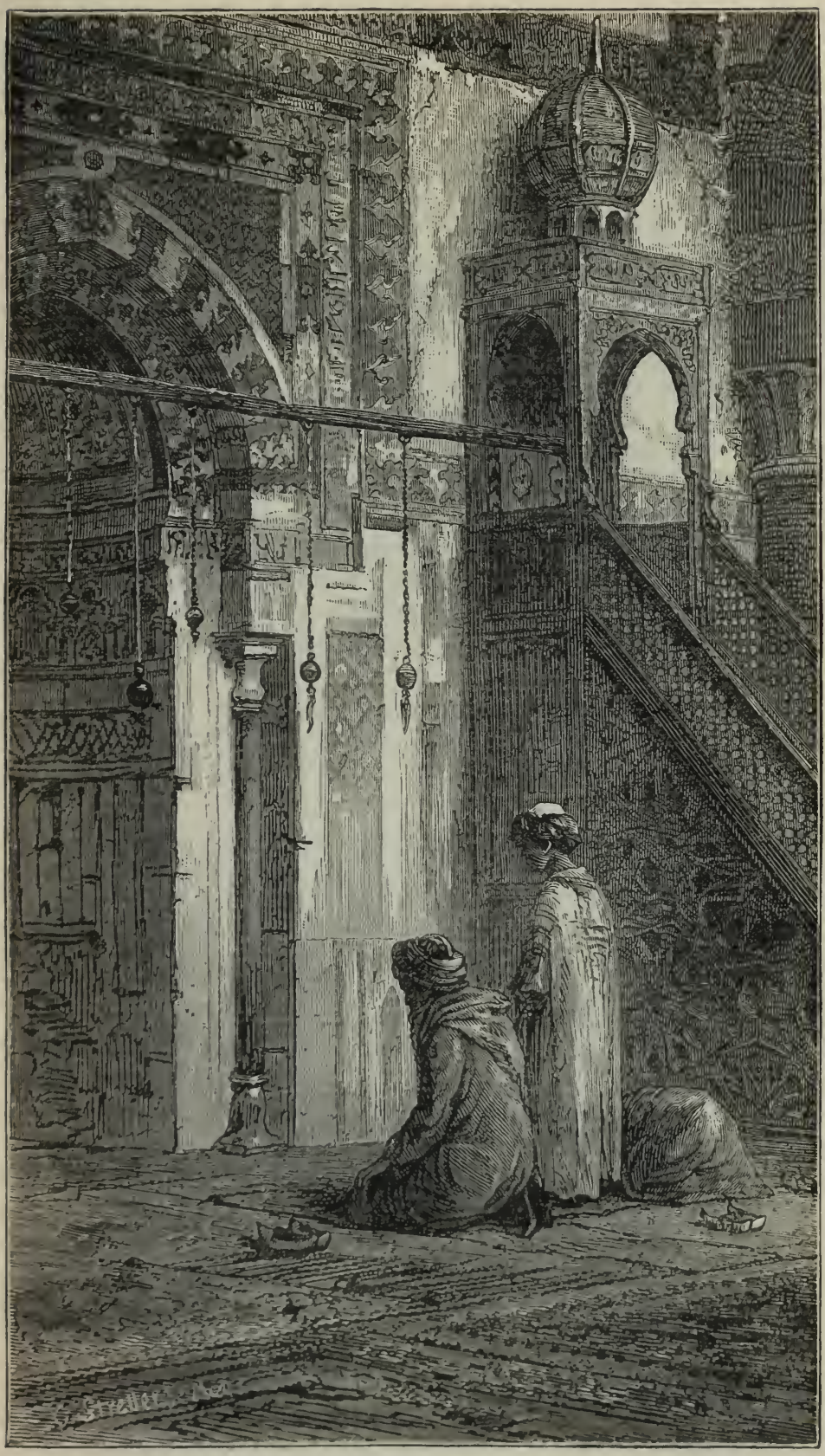
We looked upon the scene until the sun went down, and the gorgeous colours died out of the sky; and we pictured to ourselves the wonderful silence and solitude of those great desert wastes beyond the Pyramids, as Tum spread his mantle and Night and Darkness crept over the earth.

It was our last sunset from these heights, and with it our task ends.

To us the chronicling of these records has been a labour of love, for we cannot remember the time when the Lotus-Land had no place in our affections; but we hardly dare hope that the reader has followed us in our wanderings with equal pleasure. Yet patience has its reward: and everything draws to a conclusion.

Before another sunset we had turned our faces westward, away from the Lotus-Land. Our days had been crowded with interest, our nights with dreams of flowing rivers and mighty cities and a great people, mixed up with all the wonders of the Arabian Nights. The hours had passed as moments.

Only too soon does the end come on these occasions; as the end comes for all things in this changing world. Our life is made up of



THE MECCA NICHE.

fragments; much attempted, little accomplished; and the undertones are those saddest of all words: Farewell and Nevermore. These like solemn bells for ever sound in our ears. All pleasures, all delights, are overshadowed by the thought: *This also shall pass away;* and wise was that mighty Eastern king who had it engraved upon his ring as his life's motto. For the joys of everlasting youth, the repose of perfection, surcease of sorrow, each must wait until he has crossed a river far longer, deeper, colder, more terrible than the Nile, and taken a journey more solitary than the most untrodden wilds of the Great Desert itself.

But until the Dark Shadow falls and the silent wings are outspread; until the silver cord is loosed and the wheel is broken at the cistern; until the very last grain of life's golden sands has run out: there remains to us this glorious world, crowded with all its beauties of nature, art, antiquity: wonders even now beyond our mortal grasp: of which the Lotus-Land possesses more than its share.

And in taking leave of our beloved Lotus-Land, what better form can we employ than the words spoken by Osman as his train steamed away towards Alexandria: "*Adieu iusqu'au revoir?*"

A Desert Home.

HAUNTED ASHCHURCH.

IT was a lonesome little country church, quite deserted and rapidly falling into decay. The nearest house was that of old Joe Salter, the blacksmith, and that was fully half-a-mile away. It could not be said that the little fabric possessed anything of architectural beauty or interest : a plain, oblong building, with a square, thick-set, squat tower. It had no chancel.

It was hard upon fifty years since regular services had been discontinued at Ashchurch, owing to the building and endowment of a handsome new church, nearer the centre of population and better adapted to the requirements of the parish.

For about the first half of these fifty years, the cracked old bell of Ashchurch still rang occasionally for the funerals of old residents of the parish ; for the churchyard was not declared closed when the Sunday services ceased.

But the time came when the authorities decided that henceforward all burials must be in the new cemetery.

Up to that time, the aged church had been kept in some sort of repair, and had, at any rate, been water-tight. But, from that time, the efforts made to keep it so had been but spasmodic and inadequate, and, year by year, it became more and more dilapidated.

The ivy now grew in unchecked luxuriance, not only over the walls, but over the roof. As for the tower, it became a perfect bush of creepers under which the form of the masonry was concealed, like that of an esquimaux in his furs.

The once trim laurel hedge put forth greedy arms, and embraced within its unwieldy and irregular width many of the moss-grown gravestones. Grass grew coarse and rank on the churchyard paths. Here and there a headstone or mound of green turf showed signs of care and loving tendance ; but, as a rule, the graves, like the church itself, looked neglected and desolate, and some were hidden by foxglove and nettles.

A stranger, accidentally detained in the parish by the effects of a fall from his horse, being convalescent, had strolled aimlessly down the narrow, winding lane, which led to the church, and, coming suddenly upon it, had been struck by its forlorn appearance.

Leaning over the rusty-hinged churchyard gate, he descried a woman and a sturdy girl hurriedly weeding one of the smallest of the green mounds of its rank growth of dock-leaves. His attention could not but be arrested by the headlong haste which characterised their performance of a task over which love usually lingers long.

As he was desirous of learning something of the history of the church, and of the causes of its present state of decay, he, with some

difficulty, opened the crazy old gate and went towards them. But though he succeeded, by dint of questioning, in eliciting most of the facts, of which the reader is already in possession, he found the woman far from communicative and evidently anxious to be gone. Once only did her natural love of gossip prompt her to impart unsolicited information.

"Volks hereabout *du* say," she began, "ez how *she* had a hand——" But here, as though frightened at her own impulse, she broke off abruptly and, turning short round, ambled off at the top of her speed, closely followed by the girl, without shutting the gate behind her. The stranger heard the patter of their feet hurrying down the lane, and smiled the superior smile of an educated man.

"Some superstitious fancy!" he said to himself.

Choosing a flat tombstone, he lay down at full length thereon, and gave himself up to the full enjoyment of the lovely summer's evening. The pure physical pleasure of it, to one who had so lately been an invalid, was most grateful and soothing.

The intense quiet of the place, amid the sound sleepers beneath the sod, its touching air of desertion and its uncared-for aspect, the history of the abandonment of the church—all appealed strongly to his imagination, and he was soon lost in a dreamland of musings. At length, warned, by a cold gust of evening air, that he was hardly strong enough yet to risk being out in the dew, he rose to go.

He was amazed to find that he must have been there over two hours. It was getting dusk, and his watch told him it was half-past eight. He turned to take one last look at the lorn church, and, as he did so, caught a glimpse of the white drapery of a woman's skirts in the act of disappearing round the north-west corner of the tower.

He had a strong distaste for anything like intrusion on the privacy of one who was possibly visiting the grave of a relation, and he accordingly left the churchyard, without again turning his head.

But he was conscious that it cost him a strong effort to do so, owing to a most extraordinary craving, which he could not for the life of him explain, to look round the corner of the tower. On his emerging from the lane, he saw the cheerful glow of the blacksmith's forge some way ahead. Salter had done some work for him, and it might, he thought, be as well to ask the loan of a top-coat for the rest of his way home. In height and build they were much alike. So he turned in at the half-door of the forge.

"My sakes!" said the blacksmith, heartily, "why, it's Muster Cortram. Glad to see you, sir, out and aboot, though 'tis maist too sharp a evening, and you not quite set oop, as ye may say."

"True, Salter, and so I've come to ask you to lend me an overcoat."

"Right you are, sir, and welcome, too; but set ye down and have a warm first."

And the blacksmith, mindful of the duties of hospitality, drew his

shirt-sleeves down over his mighty arms, and proceeded to light a pipe, by way of company to Mr. Cortram's cigar.

"'Tis a quaint spot this close by you," said the latter, as he struck a light and passed it over to Salter.

"Meaning—— ?" queried the smith, as he held the match over the bowl.

"Ashchurch."

Salter let the match drop.

"What ! have you been there at this hour o' night ?"

"Hour of night indeed ! Why, it is barely dusk, and what is more, some lady or other is probably there still."

This time the blacksmith dropped his pipe, and it was smashed against the anvil in the fall. The man was pale as death.

"What ails you, Salter, my man ? Here, have a cigar."

Salter took no notice of the proffered cigar-case. With an effort he drew himself up to his full height, and, in the deep shadows and strong lights of the forge he looked like a prophet of the olden time as he said, most earnestly and solemnly :

"Mr. Cortram, sir, go ye home, do ye now, and pray to-night when ye sez yer prayers, as in coorse ye do, that no harm may come this night to you or any av yer famuly."

Mr. Cortram respected the man's emotion, though quite at a loss to guess its cause, and, without bothering him further about the overcoat, walked briskly home.

Next day he sallied forth as usual in the evening for a stroll, but had not gone far when he met a mounted messenger from the telegraph office of the neighbouring town, who recognised him and handed him a telegram. It announced the sudden death of an uncle the previous evening at half-past eight o'clock. The recollection came to him like a sudden gust of icy wind, chilling his heart, that, at that very time, he had seen the mysterious white dress fluttering round the corner of Ashchurch tower. Why his instinct connected the two things together he could not divine. He was by no means a fanciful man, but was generally credited with a clear head and strong common-sense.

Having the responsibility for the arrangements of his uncle's funeral, he left the place that evening.

Some months went on, but, notwithstanding a great pressure of business, which came upon him in consequence of his uncle's death, the mystery of Ashchurch continually recurred to him. The strange behaviour of the peasant woman in the churchyard, the unexplained emotion of the blacksmith, his own strong and unaccountable yearning, that memorable evening, to look behind the tower, the odd coincidence of his uncle's death with his glimpse of the white dress, passed and repassed before his mind's eye over and over again.

One evening he had sat down to look over old papers and letters, with a view to destroying what was worthless. His uncle's corres-

pondence had been extensive, and the task was a fatiguing one. He was on the point of giving it up for the night, when, out of one of the letters, there dropped a square piece of yellow-looking paper which fluttered down upon the carpet. He listlessly picked it up.

The inscription on it was so curiously in accord with the subject uppermost in his thoughts, that he was roused into strong interest. It ran thus :—

> "Her vesture, dimly seen afar,
> To him who sees, an evil star ;
> Her self who sees, he shall be blest,
> And give her weary spirit rest."

His mind was so possessed with the conviction that the two first lines of the doggerel described what he had himself recently experienced, that he felt no surprise, at the time, on reading at the head of the letter in which the paper had been enclosed, the word "Ashchurch," over the date.

The letter turned out to be one written to his uncle by a former resident in the parish of Ashchurch, who had been many years dead.

It gave a long account of the Ashchurch ghost, quoting several cases of its white robes having been seen in the moment of their disappearance round a corner of the church—always the same corner, viz. the north west, and, in each case, some disaster was found to have befallen the person witnessing the spectral appearance at the very moment of the ghostly dress having been seen.

Strangely enough, Cortram had never heard his uncle mention the subject, and, up to the date of his accident some months before, he had never even heard the name of Ashchurch. On turning to his uncle's diary he found, within a week of the date of the letter, the following entry :—

"Went to Ashchurch ghost-hunting, to prove to poor Conner what fudge it all is."

The next entry was a fortnight later :—

"Not so sure about fudge. I certainly saw something ; but it was probably a wreath of mist."

And three days further on :—

"George died the very night, and the very hour, in which I saw that something."

George was a cousin.

It appeared, from Mr. Conner's letter, that the rhymes on the bit of paper were a copy from an old parchment found in a chest in Ashchurch tower. Cortram carefully preserved both the letter and the copy of verses. His uncle had left him all his property, and he therefore wound up his own business, and settled down, as best he could, to the life of a country gentleman.

But he felt that the associations of Ashchurch had taken so powerful a hold of him that he could not shake it off. He had a feeling that, in some inexplicable way, against which his will seemed

powerless to contend, he was being drawn to visit the place again. He long battled with the feeling as being morbid and childish. But finding that he was growing hippish and sleepless, he determined to try whether the actual sight of the place would not work a cure.

So about a twelvemonth after his first visit to it, he found himself once more in the Ashchurch lane, on an evening late in June.

He had been some days in the parish and had employed the interval in getting as much information as he could out of the oldest inhabitants; but this amounted to little beyond what he had already learned from Mr. Conner's letter to his uncle.

Of late years even the lane leading to the church had been religiously shunned by the parishioners; and a ghost, it is plain, cannot be seen without somebody to see it.

One additional piece of evidence, however, he had got at quite accidentally.

It happened that one day he had called upon the village doctor, whose acquaintance, in his professional capacity, he had made during his last stay in Ashchurch. The doctor was a squarely-built, weather-beaten man, as prosaic and matter-of-fact as a man could be. The conversation turned upon Mr. Conner.

"I knew him well," observed Dr. Cawson, "and attended him for some years before his death. He died at five minutes past four, on December 10th, twelve and a half years ago."

"Do you always remember so accurately the time of your patients' departure, Dr. Cawson?"

"Why—no! But there were peculiar circumstances——"

"Do tell me what they were."

"If you will promise not to laugh at me. It fell out, that afternoon, that I had been paying some professional visits, and was returning home by Ashchurch Lane on foot. I remembered that, in a corner of the churchyard, there grew a herb which I had often found useful, so I jumped over the gate to gather some. I was busy doing so, when I remembered I had another engagement later on and must make haste. Glancing at my watch I found it was five minutes past four. Just then, in the dim light, I saw the white train of a woman's dress disappearing round the corner of the church. It was so real, to my mind, that I felt sure I should have seen the whole figure if I had raised my head earlier. I had heard of the same sort of thing having been noticed before, and am not ashamed to say that I got back into the lane and home as fast as ever I could. When I reached my own door, I found that a messenger had been sent by Mrs. Conner, in my absence, to say I was urgently wanted, as Mr. Conner had been suddenly taken worse. I went immediately, but was too late. He had died at five minutes past four."

"And have you any theory about it, doctor—any explanation?" The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and the conversation changed.

Thinking of this, among other things, Cortram slowly proceeded

towards the church. He felt a strong presentiment of some coming event approaching him with the slow steps of fate.

The gate had grown so rusty that it was some time before he could force it open. A hasty glance round the churchyard told him that neglect and decay were rapidly doing their work. The place was a greater picture of desolation than ever. He stationed himself where he could best watch the north-west corner of the building, leaning his arms on a headstone, and concentrating his whole attention on the spot where the apparition had before shown itself.

For a long time he so remained till his eyes began to ache with the fixity of their gaze.

At length there appeared on the surface of the ground, not more than two yards from the corner of the tower, a sort of wreath of vapour, as it seemed, gradually gathering consistency and moving very slowly along the ground towards the tower till at length it took the semblance of trailing garments.

It was in the act of disappearing as it had done before, when with a peculiar wavy motion of the drapery it suddenly seemed to halt, leaving still a portion distinctly visible, as though the mysterious wearer of the dress were standing just behind the ivy-covered corner.

Cortram felt his hair stand on end, and a cold dew seemed to break out on his forehead. Nevertheless he felt impelled to advance, as though some hidden agency within him, more powerful than his own will, were using his limbs for its own purpose.

And still, as he got more abreast of the tower, as well as nearer to it, more and more of the ghostly drapery became disclosed, till at length the tall figure of a woman, with a hood drawn over her face, stood close beside him.

Cortram, as though in a dream, heard a voice he did not recognise as his own, yet a voice using his tongue and his lips, say, in a hoarse whisper :

" In Heaven's name, what troubles you ? "

Slowly the hood fell from the figure's face, a face unutterably sad and inexpressibly sweet, and its shadowy hand pointed to the wall of the tower. Then the lines of the shape grew indistinct and it melted away. Cortram staggered forward and marked the spot towards which the hand had pointed by tearing down a twig of ivy.

He then, with a shiver, hurried homewards, but a deadly faintness came over him, and ere he had gone many yards, he fell down in a swoon. When he came to himself, the moon was high in heaven, and it was close upon midnight.

As he crept home to his lodgings, stiff and cold, he determined to come next day alone and thoroughly examine the spot he had marked —having the profoundest conviction that he was on the verge of some discovery. Accordingly, after a good night's rest, feeling no ill effects from his adventure of the previous evening, he went once more to the little churchyard.

He found the branch of ivy hanging down with drooping leaves, and after some groping, he discovered a chink in the wall, into which he could thrust his hand, and out of which he drew a small wooden box, with clamps of iron at the corners, and tightly shut. With the help of a chisel which he had brought with him he burst it open.

Within there lay a paper folded and sealed. He opened and read it. In modern English it ran as follows :

"I, George Cord, killed my wife, Grace Mabel Cord, taking her unawares with a knife in the back, on the 3rd of August, 1742, when she was going round the corner of Ashchurch Tower, to visit our baby's grave, which was my pretext for getting her into a lonesome place, being firmly set to take her life. I buried her in a hole dug under the hornbeam on the north side. God help me! I have spilt the blood of the purest and sweetest wife ever man had, on foul and most unworthy suspicion, which drove me mad. I have this day found proof of her utter innocence. I leave this confession where the next comer will not fail to find it. In five minutes I shall swing dead from a limb of the hornbeam. And may God have mercy on my soul."

Cortram folded the paper carefully up, and having put it in his pocket, after replacing the box in the chink of the wall, went straight to the parish doctor's house. He caught him as he was starting off on his rounds.

"One word, doctor. Have you ever heard of one, George Cord, who committed suicide in Ashchurch some hundred years ago?"

"Yes, they say a rich young squire of that name hanged himself on a tree in the churchyard."

"Was any reason alleged?"

"The tale goes that his heart was broken by an unfaithful wife, who left him, and was never seen or heard of more."

"It was a lie, and I can prove it."

The doctor stared.

"Come to my room, after you have been your rounds, and I will tell you all about it."

The doctor and Cortram took such steps as were possible to clear the memory of George Cord's wife of the cloud which had so long rested upon it.

Her husband must have meant to place the little box in as conspicuous a position as possible, but it had dropped out of the trembling fingers, further into the chink than he had intended, and the ivy had grown over it. The poor bones under the hornbeam were given Christian burial in the husband's grave, and the dust of the murderer and the murdered commingle in peaceful rest.

It was the last funeral in the old churchyard. Nevermore were the ghostly trailing garments seen sweeping round the corner of Ashchurch Tower.

THE UGLY MAN.

THERE were five of us—all girls—and I was the Cinderella. My four sisters had been educated in Paris, each had been presented at Court, and each had made her *début* in London society under the wing of a distant cousin, Lady Elizabeth Tabor.

But none of my sisters were married. Why, I was never allowed to question—there was a profound silence on the subject, and no opinion had ever been ventured by any member of the family as to the cause of their perpetual maidenhood. But Janet, the maid-of-all-works, had been heard to remark, "I'll eat my head if it isn't all on account of them family warts on the sides of their noses." And I firmly believe it became the accepted idea.

Now I had escaped this obnoxious and disfiguring inheritance, and therefore, in spite of the fact that there was no money left to educate me, and not the ghost of a chance of a London season of presentation at Court: in spite, I say, of all this, my family regarded me as a possible matrimonial subject.

I was very minute, and I don't think I was a beauty; but there was a fair amount of intelligence in my face, and the country air and simple life had kept the round roses in my cheeks, and the light in my nut-brown hair and green-grey eyes. But I never had time to think about these things: I have called myself the Cinderella, and that means that I was incessantly employed from morning till night, because, you see, I had no accomplishments to "keep up," and *someone* had to do the dusting, baking, preserving, and family millinery, and if I had had more leisure I doubt if I should have spent it otherwise than I did. My recreation in summer was a book in the cherry-tree, high up in the thick branches, where I could plant my feet and rest my back, and forward my self-cultivation. In winter, when the flooded fields were frozen, I wove my dreams of wild romance as I rushed through the frosty air on my skates and drank to intoxication the winter's fairy wine.

It was summer time when I first saw the Ugly Man, and it happened in this wise. The cherry-tree, in which I sat, flourished outside our rectory garden in a field, through which there was a short cut to the market-place. My father had made this footpath in consideration for some of his aged parishioners who had to carry heavy baskets backwards and forwards to market, and who in gratitude had never abused his kindness by robbing his fruit-trees, or trespassing on the adjoining fields. So that one hot August afternoon, I was somewhat surprised to see from my arm-chair in the leafy boughs a man slowly approaching me, with evident intention of taking a nap beneath the shade of my tree.

But as he came nearer I saw he was a gentleman and a stranger.

I could not see his face, peep through the branches as I might, and I had not a chance when he sat down with his back to me and drew his hat over his eyes.

I did not stir lest he might discover me and become a bore, and I read on without further thought of him. But whether it was the sultriness of the day, or the proximity to the slave of Morpheus below, a dreadful drowsiness overcame me, my eyelids closed, my mouth opened, the book in my hands slipped slowly down, down, from branch to branch, till it landed plump on the individual's hat.

I started in horror, and he sprang to his feet, picked up the volume and examined the flyleaf carefully,

"HILDA REEVES.

FROM HERSELF.

'Where'er she lie,
Locked up from mortal eye,
In shady leaves of destiny.'"

Then he looked up, and bobbed about like a jack-in-the-box till he saw me. I was staring down upon him, not at all inclined to apologise, and disgusted at his ugliness. He was a clean-shaven man of about thirty, with a large, deeply lined mouth, a huge forehead, and tiresomely piercing eyes that were bound to discover whatever they searched for.

"Is this your book?" he asked, raising his hat. At any rate, his voice was mellifluous.

"Yes; I am so sorry it fell! Were you hurt?"

"Not in the least! But am I trespassing; is this private land? I thought by the foot-path——"

"Oh, it doesn't matter a bit. You are a stranger here, I suppose. The field belongs to the rectory, but any one may pass through it. Pray resume your rest, unless I have disturbed you too completely."

"And you? How shall I give you back your book?"

"Don't trouble, I am coming down." And I began to spring in my usual way from branch to branch. Whether I was too anxious to perform my feat as gracefully as possible, or whether I turned giddy, I don't know, but when the passage became a little intricate I lost my footing and slipped, and must have come a crash to the ground, if the Ugly Man had not stretched out his arms and caught me. Once on my feet again I looked up at him with flaming cheeks and dishevelled hair.

"How very clumsy of me; I feel so annoyed."

"Please don't—it was a presumption, but what was I to do? You would certainly have injured yourself if I hadn't caught you."

I held out my hand. "I was ungrateful! Come back to the house with me, and let me give you a cup of tea."

His hand closed over mine for a brief second—nay, it was an electric eternity! An unutterable thrill shook me from head to foot

when I met his touch, and I led the way to the rectory in silence with a strange wonder at my heart.

Everyone was out but my father, and I took my rescuer straight to the library, and explained the circumstances. A few minutes later, when I entered with the tea-tray, I found them in interested conversation. The Ugly Man came to my assistance, with a quietness and grace, that went well with his slight, delicate figure. If only he hadn't been quite so ugly! I watched his face narrowly, as he talked, to try and discover some redeeming feature, but the light was uncertain, and he sat with his back to it; once when he shifted his seat, and glanced at me with some question, I caught a gleam from his eyes that was almost an electric flash, and I saw they were as clear and blue as the heavens.

He had travelled a great deal, and had just returned to England to see after some property that had come into his command.

"You are like our neighbour, Sir Guy Prior," my father said; "he has been abroad for years, and now his old rascal of an uncle is dead, he has come to take up his abode among us—at least I hope so, for I like the look of him. I saw him as I passed the place this morning giving his orders for the laying out of some waste land."

"What sort of a man is he—young?" The Ugly Man spoke with indifference, and I began to wonder if after all he were not laughing at us, and our unsophisticated ways.

"Quite a lad," my father replied. "Must you go? well, I am very much obliged to you, my good sir, for your kindness to my little daughter; I hope it will cure her of risking her neck again."

"I am afraid I made the risk," he answered, smiling, and bending on me, as he thrilled me once more with his touch, a long, scrutinizing gaze.

My sisters were delighted with my adventure, and I refrained from describing my rescuer, that they might have the full benefit of a possible romance. But it fell to the ground a few days afterwards, when I was busy jam-making, and saw him swing up the path. A ridiculous rush of blood flew to my face, and I had no time to wrench off my sticky apron before he had reached the window, and was smiling in upon me.

"I have come to fetch my stick I left here," he explained; "I hope I am not a bother."

I unfastened the kitchen door and let him in.

"What hot work," he said, laughing at my refusal to give him a sticky hand; "isn't it too much for you?"

"It will soon be done."

To my astonishment, before I would raise the least objection he had seated me comfortably in the cushioned window-seat, and was stirring the stew-pan himself. He asked for directions, and I gave them, and watched him with intense amusement complete the business by filling the jam jars that were waiting on the table.

"Now I think I have earned a request, Miss Hilda," he said coolly.

"What is it?"

"That you will let me sit here with you a few minutes and smell the honeysuckle."

I drew into my corner, and he seated himself opposite to me, and soon he had landed me in burning fields of poesy and art. The clock struck five, and I started up.

"Come into the drawing-room," I said; "I must get tea, and you will find my sisters there."

My father showed great pleasure at seeing him again, and welcomed him warmly. I knew my sisters' expression so well, that I felt inclined to laugh right out as I read their disappointment, and I knew their thoughts as if they had uttered them—"Ugly little man!" "Hideous little monster!" And when they heard his name was plain John Smith, their disgust was supreme. However, they good-naturedly assured me when he had gone, that they would not stand in my way. And they left me day after day as the summer slipped away, and I found myself constantly by his side, to entertain him as I would. I had no thoughts of falling in love, but gradually and absolutely my whole heart went out to him in all its fire of passion, and there was only restlessness and torture for me away from him. Soul to soul we spoke of things that touched our keenest sensibilities, and life became a grand, glorious reality to me.

No one had made the acquaintance yet of Sir Guy Prior, but he was giving a big "house-warming," and we were all invited. My sisters were elated; each in her heart dreamed of triumph at last! They discussed their dresses, and I set up with them night after night to help the anxious preparations. They tried good-naturedly to arrange a gown for me, but nothing would fit, and there was no time for alterations. I did not care in the least, till the Ugly Man, as we continued to call him, said to me the day before, "How many dances will you give me to-morrow?"

"Oh!" I cried, "are *you* going?"

"Yes. You looked dreadfully concerned!"

I turned my face from his searching glance, and answered in a choking voice: "Because—because *I* can't go!"

My hands were locked to his breast, and he was kissing my brow.

"Do you care so much, little Hilda? Do you love me?"

I raised my eyes to his, and our lips met in one, long, passionate kiss.

"You shall—you must go!" he said presently. "I'm going in to bully those selfish sisters of yours."

"Oh, don't; they don't mean to be unkind! It has been so hard for them never to marry, and perhaps this Sir Guy will take a fancy to one of them."

John threw back his head and pealed with laughter.

"I don't want to be rude—but really, darling——"

"You are very rude," I interrupted, "and I've a great mind to come to the ball in my white muslin just to shame you."

"Is *that* all? Is it only a question of *dress?* Why, Hilda, you are perfectly lovely in that soft white gown. Promise me to wear nothing else."

I knew what a dear, whimsical thing he was, and I was mad to go, so in spite of all my sisters' remonstrances the white muslin was washed and ironed, and by nine o'clock the next night I had it on ready to start. Then a sweet surprise came to me. Janet rushed into my room with a large box in her arms.

"That sweetheart of yours has sent you some flowers, ducky!"

I opened the lid, and there lay the most exquisite wreath of lilies-of-the-valley. One I wound completely round my neck, one among my dark coils, and the rest Janet fashioned about my skirt as she chose. I gazed at myself a moment in the glass, I saw the dazzling whiteness of my bosom and arms, and I thought how fair love can make all commonplaces.

The ballroom was crowded when we arrived. My father made for a stripling youth and introduced himself and his daughters.

"Oh! *I* am not Sir Guy," the boy said, "I am only his agent. Here he is."

John Smith was coming eagerly towards us with outstretched hand.

"Let me welcome you with all my heart," he said, "to my ancestral home—and to apologise with deep contrition for what I have done."

No one spoke. My sisters were on the point of fainting.

"It was such a temptation," he went on, "to make myself liked in an unconventional way, and I never should have won my wife so easily if there had been the bridge of ceremony to cross. Hilda, won't you forgive me?"

I took his arm with a proud glad smile, and felt just as Cinderella did when the slipper fitted none other.

LILIAN STREET.

[*To face page* 521.

"JUST WHEN THE LAST GOLD LINGERS IN THE WEST."

AT EVENSONG.

If I could call you back for one brief hour,
It is at evensong that hour should be,
When bells are chiming from an old grey tower
Across the tranquil sea.

Just when the fields are sweet and cool with dew,
Just when the last gold lingers in the west,
Would I recall you to the world you knew
Before you went to rest.

And where the starry jasmin hides the wall,
We two would stand together once again;
I know your patience,—I would tell you all
My tale of love and pain.

And you would listen with your tender smile,
Tracing the lines upon my tear-worn face,
And finding, even for a little while,
Our earth a weary place.

Only one little hour! And then once more
The bitter word, farewell, beset with fears,
And all my pathway darkened, as before,
With shades of lonely years.

Far better, dear, that you, unfelt, unseen,
Should hover near me in the quiet air,
And draw my spirit through this mortal screen
Your higher life to share.

I would not call you back; and yet, ah me!
Faith is so weak, and human love so strong,
That sweet it seems to think of what might be
This hour at evensong.

Sarah Doudney.

THE WEIRD VIOLIN.

THE great Polish violinist, S——, was strolling aimlessly about the town, on a sunny, but cold afternoon, in November of a certain year. He was to play, at night, at one of the great concerts which made the town so musically famous, and, according to his usual custom, he was observing passers-by, looking in shop windows, and thinking of anything rather than the approaching ordeal. Not that he was nervous, for none could be less so, but he came to his work all the fresher for an hour or two of idle forgetfulness, and astonished his audiences the more.

Turning out of the busiest street, he ambled into a comparatively quiet thoroughfare, and, throwing away an inch of cigar-end, produced a new havannah, lighting up with every sign of enjoyment. Now, it was part of his rule, when out on these refreshing excursions, to avoid music shops, and he had already passed half-a-dozen without doing more than barely recognise them. It is therefore very remarkable that, walking by a large music warehouse in this quiet thoroughfare, he should suddenly stop, and, after remaining in doubt for a few moments, go straight to the window, and look in.

He had not seen anything when he first passed, and, indeed, he had merely ascertained, out of the corner of his eye, that one of the forbidden shops was near. Why, then, did he feel impelled to return?

The window was stocked, as all such windows are, with instruments, music, and such appurtenances as resin, bows, chin-rests, mutes, strings, bridges and pegs. An old Guanerius, valued at several hundred guineas, lay alongside a shilling set of bones, and a flageolet, an ocarina, and several mouth-organs were gracefully grouped upon a gilt-edged copy of "Elijah."

Amongst the carefully-arranged violins was a curious old instrument the like of which the virtuoso had never seen before, and at this he now stared with all his eyes. It was an ugly, squat violin, of heavy pattern, and ancient appearance. The maker, whoever he had been, had displayed considerable eccentricity throughout its manufacture, but more especially in the scroll, which, owing to some freak, he had carved into the semblance of a hideous, grinning face. There was something horribly repulsive about this strange work of art, and yet it also possessed a subtle fascination. The violinist, keeping his eyes upon the face, which seemed to follow his movements with fiendish persistency, slowly edged to the door, and entered the shop.

The attendant came forward, and recognising the well-known performer, bowed low.

"That is a curious-looking fiddle in the window," began the artist, at once, with a wave of his hand in the direction of the fiend.

"Which one, sir?" inquired the attendant. "Oh, the one with the remarkable scroll, you mean. I'll get it for you." Drawing aside a little curtain, he dived into the window-bay, and produced the instrument, whose face seemed to be grinning more maliciously than ever.

"A fair tone, sir," added the man, "but nothing to suit you, I'm sure."

As soon as Herr S—— touched the neck of the violin he gripped it convulsively, and raised the instrument to his chin. Then, for a few moments, he stood, firm as a rock, his eyes fixed upon the awe-stricken attendant, evidently without seeing him.

"A bow," said the musician, at length, in a low voice. He stretched out his disengaged hand and took it, without moving his eyes. Then he stopped four strings with his long fingers, and drew the horse-hair smartly over them with one rapid sweep, producing a rich chord in a minor key.

A slight shiver passed over his frame as the notes were struck, and the look of concentration upon his face, changed to one of horror; but he did not cease. Slowly drooping his gaze, the performer met the gibing glance of the scroll-face, and though his own countenance blanched, and his lips tightened, as if to suppress a cry, the bow was raised again, and the violin spoke.

Did the demon whisper to those moving, nervous fingers? It almost seemed to be doing so; and surely such a melody as came from the instrument was born of no human mind. It was slow and measured, but no solemnity was suggested; it thrilled the frame, but with terror, not delight; it was a chain of sounds, which like a sick man's passing fancy, slipped out of the memory as soon as it was evolved, and was incapable of being recalled.

Slowly, when the last strains were lost, the great violinist dropped both arms to his side, and stood for a few moments, grasping violin and bow, without speaking. There were drops of perspiration on his forehead, and he was pale and weary-looking; when he spoke, it was in a faint voice, and he seemed to address himself to something invisible.

"I cannot endure it now," he said. "I will play again to-night."

"Do you wish to play on the instrument at this evening's concert, sir?" inquired the dealer, not without some astonishment at the choice, much as the performance had affected him.

"Yes—yes, of course!" was the reply, given with some irritability, the speaker having apparently roused himself from his semi-stupor.

As the dealer took back the fiddle, he chanced to turn it back uppermost. It was a curiously marked piece of wood, a black patch spreading over a large portion, and throwing an ugly blur upon the otherwise exquisite purfling.

"See!" gasped the artist, pointing a shaking finger at this blotch, and clutching at the shopkeeper's shoulder. "Blood!"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the other, shrinking back in alarm. "Are you ill, sir?"

"Blood, blood!" repeated the half-demented musician, and he staggered out of the shop.

It was night, and the concert-room was crowded to excess. The performers upon the platform, accustomed as they were to such sights, could not but gaze with interest at the restless sea of eager, expectant faces which stretched before them.

That indescribable noise, a multitude of subdued murmurs, accompanied by the discordant scraping of strings, and blowing of reeds, was at its height; now and then a loud trombone would momentarily assert itself, or an oboe's plaintive notes would rise above the tumult; and, in short, the moment of intense excitement which immediately precedes the entrance of the conductor was at hand.

Suddenly, the long-continued confusion ceased, and, for an incalculably short space of time, silence reigned. Then a storm of deafening applause burst forth; necks were craned, and eyes strained in vain attempts to catch an early glimpse of the great violinist who was to open the concert by playing a difficult Concerto of Spohr.

It was noticed, that as the virtuoso followed the grey-haired conductor to the centre of the platform, he was unusually pale; and those who were seated at no great distance from the orchestra, observed also that he carried a curious violin, instead of the Stradivarius upon which he was wont to perform.

A tap on the conductor's desk, a short, breathless silence, and the sweet strains of the opening bars issued from the instruments of a hundred able musicians.

The soloist, with a sinking at the heart which he could scarcely account for, raised the violin to his shoulder, and saw, for the first time, that it had been re-strung. As he invariably left stringing and tuning to others, this would appear to have been a matter of no moment, and yet it had a strange effect upon him. Again that shudder passed through his body, and again he unwillingly met the glance of those diabolical eyes upon the scroll. Horror of horrors! was the face alive, or was he going mad?

The band, which had swelled out to a loud forte, now dropped to a pianissimo. The moment had arrived. Herr S—— raised his bow, and commenced the lovely adagio.

What had come to him? Where were the concert room, the orchestra, the anxious crowd of people? What sounds were these? This was not Spohr, this sweet melody so like, and yet so unlike the weird music which he had played in the dealer's shop. What subtle magic had so acted upon those strains that their horror, their cruel mockery had entirely vanished, and sweet, pure harmony alone remained?

It seemed to the player that he stood within a small, but comfortably

furnished room. Two figures were in the room, those of a beautiful young girl, and of a dark, handsome, foreign-looking man.

There was something in the face of the latter which vividly recalled the face upon the scroll, and, strange to say, a counterpart of the violin itself rested under the man's chin.

The girl was seated at a harpsichord, and, as she played, her companion accompanied her upon his strange instrument. From the costume of both, the dreamer concluded that they were phantoms of a hundred years ago.

"Ernestine," the man was saying, in a low voice, as he passed his bow over the strings, "tell me to-night that you have not dismissed me for ever. I can wait for your love."

"It is useless," replied the girl—"oh, it is quite useless! Why importune me further? I could never love you, even if I were not already promised to another."

A savage light gleamed in the man's eye, and more than ever he looked like the face on the violin; but he did not immediately reply, and the music went on.

"You tell me it is useless," he said, at length, "and I tell *you* that it is useless. Useless for you to think of him. Do you hear?" he continued, lowering his violin, and leaning towards her. "You shall never marry him; I swear it by my soul."

The girl shrank from him, and the music ceased. Though he did not know it, the dreaming violinist had reached the conclusion of the adagio movement. He did not hear the deafening plaudits which greeted the fall of his bow; he knew nothing of the enthusiasm of the orchestra, or the praise of the conductor; he heard no more music.

Look! what is this? The girl has seated herself upon a couch, and her lover, his violin still in his left hand, is kneeling at her feet, passionately imploring her to listen. She expostulates for awhile, then repulses him and rises. A malignant fire darts from the furious foreigner's eyes; something bright gleams in his hand; he rushes forward, raises his arm to strike——

The presto movement had commenced, and an extraordinary circumstance soon made itself apparent to the audience. The violinist was running away with the band. Greatly to the horror of the conductor, the tempo had to be increased until a prestissimo was reached. Still the performer was not satisfied, there seemed no limit to his powers to-night; his fingers literally flew up and down the finger-board; his bow shot to-and-fro with incredible swiftness; and yet the music grew quicker, quicker, until the unhappy conductor, who with difficulty pulled along the toiling band, felt that a fiasco was inevitable.

On, on rushed the fingers and the bow, faster, and faster still; a few of the bandsmen fell off from sheer exhaustion, and stared, horror-

stricken, at the mad violinist. Some of the listeners rose in alarm, and many were only detained, by extreme anxiety, from bursting into loud and frantic applause.

Suddenly, with the loud snap of a string, the spell was broken. The orchestra, unable now to proceed, stopped in utter confusion, and a loud sigh of released suspense went up from thousands of throats. Then the whole mass rose in sudden horror, as the violinist dropped his instrument with a crash upon the platform, stared wildly around, clasped a hand to his side, and, with a strange cry, fell to the ground insensible.

For weeks the great violinist lay between life and death; then nature reasserted herself, and he recovered. But it was long, very long, ere he could again appear in public; whilst the weird and mysterious violin never again sent forth its strange and mysterious influence. It had been hopelessly shattered in that last night of its performance, which had well-nigh proved fatal to the world-famed player.

AN ENGLISH GARDEN.

Its red-brick walls are high and old,
  Grey flowering grasses wave thereon,
There clings the wallflower's glorious gold,
  The sulphur-coloured snapdragon;
The white and purple lilacs bloom
  Against the sun-warmed southern wall,
And from the yew-trees' heights of gloom,
    The scarlet berries fall.

Beside the smooth tree-girdled lawn
  Ungathered roses bud and blow,
There, when the wind blows from the dawn
  Pale petals fall like drifted snow.
No foot falls on that dewy slope,
  No hand puts back the trailing briar,
But ghosts walk there—the ghosts of hope,
    And memory, and desire.

E. Nesbit.

A DARK DESIGN.

A STORY IN SEVEN CHAPTERS.

By the Author of "The Hara Diamond."

CHAPTER I.

THE stable clock was striking nine as Major Sulgrave shut the side door of the hall of Langley Prior softly behind him and emerged into the open air.

It was a March evening, wild and wintry, with sudden fierce gusts of wind blowing, as it seemed, first from one point of the compass and then from another, and intermittent stinging showers of ice-cold rain. Here and there a few stars shone wanly through the ragged fleeces of cloud that went scurrying across the sky. The noise made by the wind among the trees in the park smote the ear now and again like the rush and roar of a waterfall.

Major Sulgrave was equipped for the weather in a rough homespun ulster, a thick muffler, and a close-fitting travelling cap, the peak of which was pulled well forward over his eyes.

On quitting the house, instead of keeping to the foot-path, which, although it ran at an angle to the gravelled carriage drive, led direct to one corner of the park, he made his way across the sodden grass and, as much as possible, in the deeper shadow of the trees, as though wishful to avoid being seen or recognised by any of the servants, or others who might chance to be on their way to or from the Hall at that hour of the night. He had left the lamp alight in the library, where he usually sat after dinner, and had stolen out unknown to any one.

And yet there was no valid reason why he should have quitted the house after so furtive a fashion.

He was his own master and accountable to no one for his comings or goings; but there was that in his nature which inclined him to secrecy and craft in all his dealings with his fellows; it was as much a part of him to act in that way as his scheming brain, his ungovernable temper, and his callous heart, were integral parts of him, and could as little be dissociated from him. If, in order to arrive at a given end, two paths, one straight and the other crooked, were equally open to him, he would, without a moment's hesitation, choose the latter.

On this wild March evening when he comes before the reader, if he had considered the point with himself, it would have seemed to him that there could have been no fitter time than the present for quitting the house unknown to every one, and for stealing through

the solitary park as though he were guilty of that in fact of which he was already in intent.

For weeks a certain design had been slowly taking shape in the tortuous recesses of his brain, till now the time seemed right for moving in it—right for seeking the help of the one man in the world, who, as it seemed to him, had been intended by Nature for an accomplice in such a deed as the one he meditated.

A quarter of an hour's sharp walking brought him to the outskirts of Wincaster, a hilly, straggling town of some twelve or fifteen thousand inhabitants, on the edge of the Peak country.

Making his way down the narrow, old-fashioned, main street, which at that hour and in such weather was almost deserted, Major Sulgrave, with the collar of his ulster turned up so as almost completely to hide his features, came before long to the bridge over the little river Spindle, just beyond which was the house of the man he had come to see.

He noted with a certain degree of satisfaction that a light shone through the drawn blinds of the sitting-room, which might be taken as a pretty good proof that Dr. Penrose was at home.

Opening the garden wicket like one familiar with the latch, the Major traversed the narrow cobble-stoned pathway which led to the front door, and lifting the knocker gave what sounded like two slow, cautious knocks—very different from the loud peremptory summons with which he would have announced himself at another time.

Dr. Penrose in person opened the door.

"What! you—Major?" he exclaimed, lifting his shaggy eyebrows in unmistakable surprise as the light from the hall lamp flashed on his visitor. "But don't say a word till you have come inside and stripped off your wet things. I was afraid when I heard your knock that it was a summons from one of my patients, and I can assure you that I felt no desire to quit my own fireside on a night like this."

It may here be remarked that the acquaintance between the two men had its origin in an accident which had befallen Major Sulgrave about three months before the date with which we are now concerned. His horse had stumbled, and thrown him; he had been picked up insensible, and carried into Dr. Penrose's surgery close by. The accident had proved to be sufficiently serious to keep the Major a prisoner to the house for some weeks, during which he and Penrose had naturally seen a good deal of each other, and to what purpose, so far, at least, as the Major was concerned, we shall presently learn.

As the doctor waits in the lighted hall while his visitor relieves himself of his outer wraps, we will endeavour to sketch his portrait with a few light touches.

Although only about thirty years of age, Matthew Penrose looked, at least, a dozen years older. He was very tall and very lean, his face was long and thin, his nose hooked and prominent, his cheeks

sunken and sallow, and his deep-set eyes so clear, and keenly searching, as to cause many people, both among his patients and others, to fidget and feel uncomfortable whenever they were bent full upon them. He was certainly far from being an attractive-looking man, and it only needed that he should let his hair, which at all times had an unkempt and uncared-for look, grow a foot longer than it was, and clothe himself in a flame-coloured robe, to body forth the common conception of a wizard or astrologer of the Middle Ages. To this must be added, that he was abrupt in manner and speech, and indifferent to the point of slovenliness about his dress, so that there was little to wonder at in the fact that, although he had now been in practice at Wincaster for five years, he had made scarcely any headway. Of patients he had no lack, but they were of a kind which bring a man neither fame nor fortune.

In fine, Dr. Penrose was very poor, very ambitious, and very clever, although the latter was a fact which the good people of Wincaster had hitherto failed to recognise.

When the Major had doffed his sodden garments, it might have been seen that he was verging on his fortieth birthday, but he was still as thin, and nearly as active-looking as he had been when a score years younger.

By most people he would have been accounted a fairly handsome man. There was a good deal of military smartness about him, with, it may be, more than a suspicion of military swagger. He had dark close-cropped hair, which was already streaked with gray, and small side-whiskers to match. He had a long straight nose, with expanded nostrils, and a heavy jaw. There was a split in his upper lip, the result of an accident in early life, which his thick moustache could not wholly hide. His small steel-blue eyes had a watchful, coldly calculating expression; but he had a trick, when he chose to exercise it: which, to give him his due, was but seldom: of infusing them with a sort of half-humorous, half-cynical twinkle, which, taken in conjunction with a mellow laugh, and an air of almost too transparent *bonhomie*, deceived many people into setting him down as being one of those easy-going, generous-hearted men who have the reputation of being nobody's enemy but their own. Never did such shallow readers of character make a greater mistake.

"Nothing wrong at the Hall, I hope?" remarked Penrose tentatively as he led the way into his cosy sitting-room.

"No, no—nothing of that kind has brought me here on a night like this," answered the other with a touch of petulance. "The fact is, I've mewed myself up in that mouldy dungeon of a house, till I've got a fit of the blues. It's a sort of life I've not been used to. To-night I felt that I could stand it no longer, that I must either seek out somebody to talk to, or else try the effect of a dose of chloral, which (as I gave you my word, I wouldn't) I have not touched since my accident. And so, here I am."

By this time he was rubbing his chilled hands over the fire.

"And very glad I am that you have come," replied the doctor as he wheeled up a capacious easy-chair opposite his own; "for I too was beginning to feel as dull as ditch-water when you knocked; but having no desire to fall into a state of dumps, I was about to mix myself an antidote in the shape of a glass of toddy. You are just in time to join me, Major. The kettle is on the point of boiling. It won't be either the first or the second time that I've prescribed the same medicine for you."

The other did not reply. To all appearance he had fallen into a brown study, as he sat with his hands resting on his knees, staring intently into the fire. Penrose said no more, but having procured a second tumbler from the sideboard, he proceeded to mix two steaming jorums of grog. That done, he pushed a box of cigars towards his visitor, and having slowly charged a big meerschaum with tobacco, he lighted it and sat down facing the Major. He felt convinced in his own mind that the other's visit had some purpose at the back of it the nature of which he had yet to learn. Now and again he glanced at him out of a corner of his eye, but for some minutes the silence remained unbroken save by a few sputtering drops of rain driven down the wide-mouthed chimney, or by the muttered threatenings of the gale outside, which at times seemed to become almost articulate and then died away again to a troubled whisper.

"Your toddy is getting cold, Major, and losing both strength and bouquet," said the doctor at length. "To my thinking, half-cold grog is but a mawkish kind of tipple."

Thus appealed to, Sulgrave roused himself, or seemed to do so. For a few moments his eyes rested on the doctor with an expression in them such as the other was utterly at a loss to comprehend, after which he took a long pull at his tumbler and proceeded to light a cigar. Then, with his eyes again bent on the fire, he presently spoke.

"Penrose," he began, "have you any recollection of a certain talk you and I had one day in which you told me how addicted you are to toxicological studies, and favoured me with the details of a number of experiments on the actions of poisons, both mineral and vegetable, which you have conducted from time to time."

"I have not forgotten the occasion you speak of," answered the doctor.

"Supposing, now—merely to put a case, you know—that there was some one whom you were desirous of getting rid of, you would, I assume, experience no insuperable difficulty, providing you had access to the person in question and, more especially, if you were acting as his medical attendant, in carrying out your design in such a way that it would be next to an impossibility for it ever to be brought home to you?"

"Very little difficulty indeed," responded Penrose drily.

The Major emptied his glass in silence, whereupon his host proceeded to refill it as before.

"Penrose, my position is a somewhat peculiar one," resumed Sulgrave presently, without any reference to what had gone before, and again without looking his host in the face. "When my brother died some months ago he left me, as you are doubtless aware, sole guardian to his only child, a delicate, ailing girl three years old. Till she comes of age I am allowed a thousand a year out of the estate, which sum includes the cost of her maintenance and education. Eveline then of course comes in for everything, barring a paltry five hundred a year which is settled on me for life."

"But supposing the young lady should not live to see her twenty-first birthday, what then?"

"In that case *I* come in for everything. I become the Master of Langley Prior with an income of eight thousand a year."

"Only one ailing child between you and such a fortune! You were quite right in characterising your position as a peculiar one."

The Major's eyes turned and met those of the doctor. For a full minute the two men sat and looked at each other without speaking.

"You say that the child is delicate. Where is she at the present time?" It was Penrose who spoke.

"At Rouen, in charge of my wife; in which hole I have been vegetating for the last three years—or rather, I had been up to the date of Guy's death."

"At Rouen. Hum! An inland French town and, like most such places, not over healthy, I make no doubt," murmured the doctor as he scratched his chin reflectively with one of his long pointed nails. "Don't you think, now, that her native air—she was born in England, was she not?—might benefit her health, more especially if it could be combined with the ozone of the sea-side?"

"What rigmarole have you got hold of now? Hang me if I see the connection!" growled Sulgrave, turning upon him with an evil glitter in his frosty blue eyes.

Penrose smiled faintly. "You are doubtless acquainted by name, at least, with Scriven Bay, an obscure watering-place about two and a half miles from here?"

The other nodded in sullen fashion.

"Well, as it happens, I have an unmarried sister who keeps a small boarding-house there, which at this time of year is always empty of visitors. Such being the case, what could be easier than for you to bring your niece to England and arrange for her to stay a month or two at the Bay—for the benefit of her health?"

Here he leaned over the table so as to bring his face closer to the Major's, his deep-set eyes gleaming from under his shaggy brows like two keen points of flame.

"My sister would be only too glad to accommodate the little lady, and if, after a time, her health, instead of improving, should deteriorate,

and if, in spite of Drusilla's care and my medicines—for of course you would appoint me to attend her—she should gradually fade out of existence, what possible blame could attach to any one? She would have died from causes which no human skill could have controlled, or would have seemed to do so, and the next heir—meaning yourself—would step quietly into possession, while the world, after wagging its head and murmuring, 'Poor child, what a pity she died so young!' would hasten to congratulate the new Master of Langley Prior. But you don't drink, Major Sulgrave, you don't do justice to my brew," he added, as he finished his own glass at a gulp, and smacked his lips appreciatively.

The Major sank back in his chair with blanched lips and apprehensive eyes. His intention had been to feel his way with Penrose, to sound him, to touch on the subject tentatively, and then to leave it awhile to ferment in the other's mind. But the doctor, with a cold-blooded cynicism which fairly took his visitor's breath away, had leaped at a bound to the conclusion which the Major had only thought to reach slowly and by degrees. And yet, how bold, how simple, how comprehensive, and, above all, how safe seemed the scheme which a few sentences had sufficed him to propound! Doubtless the doctor, who was a poor man, would want his *quid pro quo*; men do not proffer their aid in such schemes for nothing, and the question was at what price he would rate his services, always, of course, supposing that he, the Major, should decide upon calling them into requisition.

It was not till an hour and a half later that Major Sulgrave faced the wind and rain on his way home, by which time the two confederates had arrived at a thorough agreement, and had worked out the various details of their scheme so that it should form a coherent whole without one weak link in it, as it seemed to them, on which suspicion could possibly fasten.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT later little Eveline Sulgrave, a pretty, delicate-looking child, reached England in charge of her uncle and a French *bonne*, and after a stay of a couple of days at the Hall, was given into charge of Miss Penrose, a lady some years her brother's senior, but very like him both in appearance and manner, and was by her carried off to Scriven Bay, the *bonne* being sent back home. Her uncle bade the child a hurried farewell, and heaved a great sigh of relief as he watched the brougham which was taking her away drive down the avenue. Had he really seen for the last time, and through his own act, the child whom his dead brother had confided so trustingly to his care? He gave himself a savage shake when the question put itself to him—it was his way of admonishing his conscience—and rang for brandy.

The first act of the drama had passed off without a hitch, why should not the second succeed equally well?

A month passed, and the child's health seemed to improve from day to day. Then a change set in, and she began to fade and to lose her strength by slow and almost imperceptible degrees. Miss Penrose naturally called in the services of her brother, who drove over every day from Wincaster in a hired fly to see his youthful patient. Then, after a time, a letter was written to the Major abroad, apprising him of his niece's illness, a letter such as might be seen by any one. In answer to it he wrote that it would be very inconvenient for him to visit England just then, but that, should his niece become any worse, as to which he was to be kept informed from day to day, he would not fail to do so. A week later found him at Langley Prior in obedience to a summons from Dr. Penrose. Miss Sulgrave was much worse, and her life could not be depended on from hour to hour. The Major arrived late at night, his intention being to drive over to Scriven Bay in the course of the following forenoon; but while at breakfast a message reached him from Penrose informing him that all was over, and that his niece had passed quietly away in the course of the night.

He pushed his breakfast aside and shut himself in his room, pending the doctor's arrival.

"You must come and see her, if it be only for a moment," said the latter to the Major when he reached the Hall. "People will call you unfeeling and I don't know what else, if you fail to do so. Besides, I want you to assure yourself with your own eyes, that she is really dead, and that I am not endeavouring to cozen you out of your money, by stating what is not the fact."

It was with very reluctant footsteps that Harold Sulgrave climbed the stairs which led to the chamber in which lay all that was mortal of the child whose death he and his accomplice had so ruthlessly compassed. Miss Penrose having ushered him into the room, removed the cambric handkerchief which had been spread over the face of the child, and then left him.

One quaking glance sufficed for the Major. There was the sweet face which, do what he might, would not fail to haunt his memory as long as he lived, with death's ineffaceable seal stamped upon it, set in a framework of short golden curls, which to his eyes looked like an aureola. He turned away with a shudder, feeling more sick at heart than he had ever felt before, and made his way down-stairs and out of the house, without a word to any one.

More than once, later on, he could not help asking himself, whether that tall, angular, impassive-looking Miss Penrose had been an accessory, equally with her brother, in the tragedy on which the curtain had recently fallen, or whether she had merely been an unwitting instrument in the hands of a will more unscrupulous than her own. But it was a point as to which he did not care to ask Penrose to enlighten him.

A few days later there was a quiet funeral from Langley Prior. The remains of Eveline Sulgrave, aged three years and nine months,

were laid beside those of her parents, in a vault in the little old church just outside the precincts of the park, where generation after generation of the family at the Hall have found their last resting-place.

CHAPTER III.

TIME passed on, and Major Sulgrave succeeded in due course to the estate of Langley Prior, together with certain other property which, now that his brother's only child was dead, devolved upon him as the heir-at-law.

Before long, he proceeded to take up his residence at Langley Prior, bringing with him his only son, a youth about eight years old, but leaving behind on the Continent, his wife and his stepson; for Mrs. Sulgrave had been a widow of means, when the Major persuaded her into uniting her fortunes with his, a step which she had soon found cause to regret. The marriage had proved a most unhappy one; so much so, that when the Major, after his change of fortune, announced his intention of living in England for the future, the unhappy victim of his tyranny plucked up heart of grace, and refused to accompany him. It may have been that he himself was by no means averse to the separation; in any case as far as was known, he raised no positive objection to it; but none the less was he careful to aim a last and most cruel blow at his wife, by taking young Guy away with him, and thereafter prohibiting communication of any kind between mother and son.

Thus it fell out, that neither Mrs. Sulgrave nor the Major's stepson was ever seen at Langley Prior, but although their names were never mentioned in the Major's hearing, the existence of both was a fact well known to the people of Wincaster and its neighbourhood.

When the separation had lasted seven years, Mrs. Sulgrave died, a notification of her demise appearing in due course in the *Times* and other newspapers.

Although the Major had by no means the most immaculate of reputations, and was universally suspected of being both a bully and a tyrant, the golden fact that he was worth eight thousand a year, was one which could not be gainsaid; in addition to which he was still a passably handsome man and scarcely passed the prime of life. Innumerable, therefore, were the surmises and speculations indulged in by the *quid nuncs*, spinsters, and mothers with marriageable daughters, as to whether the Master of Langley Prior would, or would not tempt fortune again in the matrimonial lottery. But time went on, and the person most concerned made no sign.

Then, when five or six years had gone by, it became bruited abroad that Guy, the son and heir, had become engaged to Lady Mary Langmere, youngest daughter of the Earl of Letchford. In

securing Lady Mary, who was both a beauty and an heiress, the county ungrudgingly recognised the fact that the Major and his son had played their cards in a way which reflected the highest credit on both of them.

But enough for the present of one whose life held a secret which would have caused his own son, had it been whispered in his ear, to shrink from him in loathing and horror. There are others who now claim our attention.

Within four months of the death of the heiress of Langley Prior, Dr. Penrose announced to all whom it concerned, that in consequence of a certain legacy (amount not stated) having accrued to him through the death of a relative, he had decided on quitting Wincaster, and buying a practice in the metropolis.

To London, accordingly, he shortly afterwards removed, his sister having previously left Scriven Bay, and gone nobody seemed to know where. Of the doctor, tidings reached one or other of his old patients from time to time. He was known to be a rising man, one who, by dint of sheer talent and indomitable energy, was slowly but surely forcing his way to the front. As years went on, he began to be spoken of as a specialist of growing reputation in connection with certain obscure forms of brain disease.

* * * * *

In the morning-room of a small but pleasant villa, known as Elderbank, and situated on the outskirts of a little out-of-the-world West-country town, sat two people in deep, but somewhat troubled converse.

They were Dr. Penrose and his sister, who, except that their faces showed a few more lines and creases than of old, and that their hair bore unmistakable traces of the passage of time, looked otherwise hardly at all changed. It may be that the doctor's thin, keen, vulturine features and deep-set eyes gave him a closer likeness to some gaunt and hungry bird of prey, than had been noticeable in his younger days; but that, perhaps, was no more than might be looked for in a man of such marked physiognomy.

"It's a pity, a very great pity, and I'm more annoyed than I care to confess!" exclaimed the doctor, in a tone of extreme vexation.

"If I had only known a year ago what you have told me to-day, if you had only confided to me the least inkling of your intentions and wishes," answered his sister, deprecatingly. "But you never said a word."

"It seemed to me altogether unnecessary to do so till the proper time should have arrived. Your own sense, Drusilla, ought to have told you that my object in establishing you and the girl in this remote place was to keep her from running any such danger as the one into which you have allowed her to walk blindfold, without, as far as I can understand, making a single effort to save her from the consequences of her folly, or, perhaps, I ought rather to say her ignorance."

"As I have already told you, Matthew, the mischief was done

before I was aware of it. After the way the young man behaved on the occasion of the railway accident a month ago (it was entirely due to his efforts that we were rescued as soon as we were from the wrecked carriages), it was only natural that he should call next day to inquire about us. He called again a few days later; after which I saw nothing more of him till the day before yesterday, when he sent in his card and five minutes later startled me as I have seldom been startled by asking my permission to pay his addresses to Evie."

"Like his impudence! They had met in the interim as a matter of course."

"Evie has since confessed as much to me, but I had not the slightest suspicion of anything of the kind."

"A pretty sort of duenna you make! A wandering artist, too, a fellow sprung from nobody knows where, and who has probably not a five-pound note in the world to call his own! Oh, Drusilla, Drusilla!"

"If I had only known! But you have never told me anything," she said again, this time with tears in her eyes. "You have always treated me as the mere nonentity you doubtless consider me to be in your thoughts."

To this her brother's only rejoinder was an impatient "Pish!"

"Besides," resumed Miss Penrose presently, "Mr. Gilmour is by no means as poor a man as you would make him out to be. He confided to me that his last year's income was something over four hundred pounds, and that this year he has reason to believe it will not be less than six hundred."

"Six or twice six, it's all one as far as he is concerned. You referred the fellow to me?"

"I did. I told him that you would be here to-morrow (your letter having led me to believe you would not arrive till then), as also that I have no voice in the matter one way or another."

"And it is your opinion that the girl is fond of him?"

"I am sure of it; and no wonder, for Basil Gilmour is really a very attractive young man, and a thorough gentleman. You must remember, Matthew, that Evie is not like a girl who has mixed much in society, or has had opportunities of comparing one man with another. Having chosen to bury her in a place like this, you can hardly be surprised if she loses her heart to the first agreeable stranger whose acquaintance she makes, more especially when their first meeting takes place under circumstances so uncommon as marked that of Evie and Mr. Gilmour."

"Humph! There may be just a grain of sense in what you say, Drusilla. Still, I hope it's not too late to nip this folly in the bud. As for waiting here till to-morrow with no other object in view than telling Mr. Basil Gilmour a bit of my mind, that is quite out of the question. As I have already told you, the train by which I have settled that we shall travel leaves here about three hours from now. So while you are getting on with whatever packing you may have to

do, I will write Gilmour a note, which will be a much more satisfactory way than the other of giving him his quietus; after which I'll have a quiet talk with Evie, which will, I fancy, cause her to open her eyes to their widest extent. Ah! here she comes up the garden path. Bless me! how bright and healthy the girl looks, and monstrously handsome into the bargain, if an old bachelor may be allowed an opinion on such a matter."

The letter Dr. Penrose proceeded to write to the young painter ran as follows:

"Sir,—Having been given to understand that, presuming on a certain service which you were fortunate enough to be in a position to render my sister, Miss Penrose, and my niece, Miss Eveline Penrose (for which their united thanks would, by most men, have been deemed an ample return), you have induced the latter on more than one occasion to meet you without the sanction or cognizance of her aunt, and further have so far succeeded in working upon her simplicity and ignorance of the world as to persuade her into consenting to your asking permission to become a suitor for her hand—I beg to inform you that the young lady in question will, in the course of a few months, come into a very considerable fortune, and that her friends have very different views with regard to her future from any which can possibly connect themselves with you.

"I trust, therefore: unless you are desirous that my niece's friends and natural guardians should set you down as a mere fortune-hunter, as a man actuated by no motives beyond those of the most mercenary kind: that your good sense will convince you that all relations between yourself and her must cease from this date wholly and for ever.

"It will be quite useless your making any attempt to seek an interview with my niece, as she and her aunt leave here (in my charge) by this evening's train.

"I am sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"Matthew Penrose."

Evie had been into the town to change her book at the library. It were not wise, perhaps, to inquire too curiously whether it was by accident or design that, as she turned her steps homeward, she and Basil Gilmour met face to face. It is enough to state that they did meet, and that Basil, having first possessed himself of her book, turned to go the way that she was going.

"One of the greatest nuisances of living in a little place like Trewella," said Evie, with a saucy glance at her companion, "is that one continually meets the same people whether one wants to or no—more especially when one doesn't want to."

"My dear Evie, happily for me I am one of those obtuse people

who can never take a hint as applying to themselves," retorted Basil; "consequently all your thinly-veiled sarcasm is thrown away as far as I am concerned."

Evie heaved a sigh.

"Yes; I ought to have remembered that it's no use trying to hurt a pachyderm with a pea-shooter."

To this Basil's only reply was a smile.

"Do you know," he said presently, "I really feel quite nervous at the thought of having to plead my cause before that formidable uncle of yours."

Evie's face clouded.

"I firmly believe there is no kinder-hearted man breathing than Uncle Matthew," she said; "but for all that, he has a very sharp tongue and he can be very severe when he thinks the occasion justifies his being so. You may well feel nervous. I tremble to think what he will say to you as soon as he understands the nature of your errand. That he will put you down as being, and will call you to your face, one of the most audacious young men it has ever been his lot to encounter, I do not for a moment doubt. And, so far, he will be quite right, for, as I have more than once told you, your audacity is one of your most marked characteristics. But it is not too late to draw back; indeed, I should strongly advise you to do so. We have both been foolish; we have both—— Pray, sir, may I ask what you find to laugh at?"

She put the question with a fine assumption of indignation, which, however, did not deceive her lover.

"I am laughing at your simplicity in imagining, or pretending to imagine, that this terrible uncle of yours, or, for the matter of that, twenty such as he, would suffice to deter me from saying what I have made up my mind to say."

"Did I not remark that your audacity was one of your most pronounced traits? One thing is certain: the more I think about the affair, the more sure I feel that he will refuse in the most positive manner to allow you and me to see any more of each other."

"In any case, we shall have paid the old boy the compliment of asking him. Afterwards, if, as you say, he should prove to be like one of the obdurate uncles in Old Comedy, why, in that case——"

"Yes, in that case?" echoed Evie, as if to fill up her lover's pause.

"I shall have a certain proposition to make to you, but it is one that I will say no more about till after my interview with Uncle Matthew to-morrow."

The messenger, who was the man-of-all-work at Elderbank, to whom Dr. Penrose's letter was entrusted to deliver, put into Basil Gilmour's hands a second epistle, at the same time that he gave him the other. This second note being addressed in a feminine hand, Basil naturally opened first. It proved, as his heart had already divined, to be from Evie Penrose. It was the first time she had written to

him, and he pressed the paper not once, but a dozen times to his lips, before reading a line of it.

"DEAR BASIL"—it ran—"On reaching home, after parting from you, I found that Uncle Matthew had arrived a couple of hours before, although aunt had not expected him till to-morrow. From a remark dropped by Mary, the parlour-maid, I learnt that they had been shut up together in the morning-room for over an hour. As to what passed between them I know nothing, but it is evidently that aunt is greatly distressed, and I am afraid that my uncle's coming bodes no good to you and me. I expect every moment that he will send for me and question me, but, as you know, I have nothing to conceal. Aunt tells me that he is going to write to you, but to what purport I dare not guess, although my heart misgives me strangely.

"And now for an unwelcome surprise. We start for London, uncle, aunt, and I, by the seven o'clock train this evening, and aunt says that she has no idea how long we may be away. The news has come upon me like a thunderclap. Uncle has just sent for me, and I have no time to add more. When shall we see each other again? That is a question impossible to answer, but whether the time be long or short, do not doubt, dear Basil, that I shall remain,

"Always your own,

"EVIE PENROSE.

"P.S.—My uncle's London address is No. 29, Great Rutland St.

After reading this carefully twice over, Basil tore open Dr. Penrose's communication. His face darkened as he read, and he drew a deep breath when he reached the end of it.

"Evie an heiress!" he muttered; "she who told me the other day that she had not a five-pound note in the world to call her own! Has some fairy godmother been waving a golden wand over her? And now, forsooth, I'm to give her up on pain of being branded as a fortune-hunter and I know not what besides! But nothing less than my dismissal from my darling's own lips shall suffice to divide us. Were I to become suddenly rich, should I not make her my wife just the same? And I will not wrong her by doubting that she—— anyhow, only from herself will I take my *congé*."

He put Evie's letter back into its envelope.

"Her note makes no mention of this sudden change of fortune," he went on, "consequently it is evident that at the time of writing she knew nothing about it. There is some mystery here. Well, they start for London by the seven o'clock train; I will make it my business to follow by the mail. By this time to-morrow, Great Rutland Street and I will have become better acquainted."

He was as good as his word. By eleven o'clock next forenoon, he was pacing the flags of Great Rutland Street and reconnoitring No. 29. The district is one which abounds with boarding-houses and furnished

lodgings. In the house opposite No. 29, there was a card in the window announcing that the drawing-room floor was to let. Basil, who was not a young man to hesitate when once his mind was made up, engaged the rooms there and then, paying a month's rent in advance. Then he set himself patiently to watch the doors and windows of Dr. Penrose's domicile.

It would have been weary work had he not been buoyed up with the thought that at any moment he might see Evie come tripping down the steps, or, at the least, catch a glimpse of her face or figure at one of the windows. He wanted to satisfy himself, first of all, that she was really located in the opposite house; after that, it would not be difficult to devise some plan, by means of which he could arrange for an interview with her.

But when four days had gone by without affording him the slightest glimpse of either Evie or her aunt, his patience became exhausted. He had seen Dr. Penrose, or the man he took to be him, pass out and in daily; callers there had been in plenty, both in carriages and on foot; but no sign or token of her whom he was hungering to see. So, on the morning of the fifth day, after the doctor had started on his rounds, Basil crossed over the way, knocked boldly at the door, and asked of the servant who answered his summons, whether either Miss Penrose or Miss Eveline Penrose was at home.

Greatly was he surprised and dismayed on being told that no such ladies lived there, or even were there on a visit. Wheresoever else the doctor might have bestowed them, it was evident that he had not brought them to his own house. Basil had wasted his time and money to no purpose.

It now occurred to him that there might, perhaps, be a letter from Evie, awaiting him at his lodgings in Trewella, which was the only address of his known to her. Accordingly he at once sent off a telegram and had the satisfaction, next morning, of receiving a re-addressed letter which had been waiting a couple of days for him. Well might his watch in Great Rutland Street prove a futile one, seeing that the letter was dated from "Laurel Cottage, Hampstead."

"Dear Basil,—Uncle Matthew thought it would be both pleasanter and healthier for aunt and me to take up our quarters at the above address, rather than at his house in Great Rutland Street; consequently here we are. So many strange things have happened during the last few days that I scarcely know whether I'm the same young woman that I was a week ago. At present I will enter into no details, but leave everything to be told you when next we meet, when you must be prepared to be very much astonished indeed. It appears that my uncle's object in bringing me to London at so short a notice was that he might take me to his lawyers in order to obtain my signature to certain documents, as to the nature or contents of which I have only the very vaguest notion. We go back to Trewella, aunt and I,

in the course of two or three days, but only to remain there a short time, as I am given to understand. I am told that the future has many surprises in store for me, but, whatever else may come to pass, it will leave unaltered and unchanged the love of your own,

"EVIE."

"P.S.—Although my uncle insists that I ought to give you up, I will *never* consent to do so, unless you wish it."

It would be useless, Basil reflected, to go in search of Laurel Cottage, seeing that, in all probability, Miss Penrose and Evie would have already taken their departure. There were a number of matters that required his attention. He would stay a couple of days longer in town, and then go back to Trewella and at once seek an interview with Evie. But it so fell out, that instead of two or three days only, a fortnight elapsed before Basil found himself again at Trewella. A sprained ankle, the result of a fall, kept him a close prisoner to his rooms for upwards of a week.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT nine o'clock in the evening of the day on which Basil Gilmour met with the accident which kept him in London a fortnight longer than he had intended, Major Sulgrave knocked at the door of Dr. Penrose in Great Rutland Street, and, having sent in his name, was presently ushered into the library, where he found the man he had come to see, his only companion being a gaunt, brindled wolf-hound which lay stretched on the rug in front of the empty fireplace.

Time had not dealt kindly with the Major; although his sixtieth birthday was still some years ahead of him, his hair was snow-white, while his face was lined and seamed like that of a man of four-score. The coldly watchful expression with which his steel-blue eyes had once habitually regarded his fellows, as though ever on the look-out to gain some advantage over them, had given place to a curiously furtive, indeed it might almost be called haunted look. To those with a gift for the reading of such signs, his bearing and demeanour gave the impression of a man whose life was being slowly but surely corroded away by the knowledge of some dark secret which he durst not reveal to any one.

But not only was it a secret which he durst not reveal; it was one which, to a certain extent, left him at the mercy of his accomplice. That the latter, as the actual perpetrator of a deed for the commission of which the other had merely paid him a certain price, might be, and indeed was, the more guilty of the two, did not count for much. Dr. Penrose was a man getting well into years. What if some day he were to be seized with a fatal illness, and, in one of those moments of weakness to which men are liable at such times, were to reveal everything!

Then again, there was that tall gaunt sister, that feminine edition of her brother—how much, or how little did she know? and who was to guarantee that her tongue would for ever remain sealed? It was the chill dread of what a day, nay, of what an hour may bring forth, which never altogether left him, and at times held him with a grip which seemed to suffocate him—that gave to the Major's eyes that strangely furtive and haunted look.

Seventeen and a half years had gone by since Major Sulgrave had looked for the last time, as he believed, on his dead niece's face, during which he and the doctor had met but once. Their paths in life lay wide apart, and each of them had only to keep on his own way in order to avoid the other. There had come a day, however, about a month anterior to the time at which we have now arrived, when the Major had sought out the doctor, not exactly of his own accord, but because he had been specifically advised to do so. The fact was that for some time back his health had been anything but what it ought to be. Latterly, symptoms had developed themselves which his ordinary medical attendant, an old-world country practitioner, hardly felt himself competent to deal with; and it was owing to his representations, and not by any wish of his own, that the Major had sought the advice of Penrose, as that of a man who had made a name for himself in dealing with such cases as the one which now submitted itself to his diagnosis.

On that occasion the two had met simply as doctor and patient. No word had been whispered between them, no slightest allusion had been let drop by either with regard to that which doubtless lay heavy on the recollection of both. The Major, after having undergone a careful examination, was sent away re-assured. There was nothing seriously the matter with him, he was told: dependent on his carefully carrying out certain instructions, a couple of months ought to see him his own man again.

And now, here he was in Great Rutland Street again; but to-night his errand was a very different one from that which had taken him there a month before.

"Good evening, Major," said the doctor, rising from his chair as the other entered the room. "After our last interview, I hardly expected to see you here again so soon. There has been no aggravation of symptoms in the interim, I hope? But pray be seated. Down, Bruno!" he added sternly to the hound, from whose throat had issued a deep muffled growl.

"Penrose, the strangest thing has happened to me within the last few hours," began the Major abruptly as he sank into an easy-chair. "I have received a notice of ejectment from a certain firm of lawyers, accompanied by a secondary notice calling upon me to refund seventeen years' rents, together with whatever other moneys may have been received by me during that time from the Langley Prior estates, the plea set up being—what think you?—Nay, if you were to guess for a

year, you would still be wide of the mark!—The preposterous plea, then, now put forward is, that they—the lawyers—are acting on behalf of—well, of a certain person who has the consummate presumption to call herself Eveline Sulgrave, and who claims to be my late brother's daughter! Whereas, with my own eyes I saw the real Eveline Sulgrave, at that time a child, laid out for the grave—*you* know when and where."

As he finished speaking, he turned his cavernous, bloodshot eyes on the doctor, and was startled to see the expression with which the latter was regarding him. A smile, which was far more than a merely cynical one, curved the doctor's thin lips: it was the smile of a man who has at last got his enemy into a corner from which there is no escape—the smile of the triumphant gladiator over his fallen opponent a moment before he deals him the last fatal thrust.

"You *thought* you saw the child in question laid out for the grave, Major Sulgrave."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other quickly with a sudden blanching of his face.

"What you really saw was not the figure of your dead niece, but a waxen effigy of the child which I had caused to be made by an Italian friend of mine. For once in a way your eyes played you false."

"A waxen effigy which you caused to be made!" gasped Sulgrave. "But for what purpose?"

"Listen, and you shall be enlightened. When first you hinted your infamous proposal to me, my immediate impulse was to denounce you for the unmitigated villain that you were; but then came the reflection that unless I seemed to fall in with your views, the child would still remain in your power, and I knew you too well not to feel assured that you would find some other mode of ridding yourself of her. It was the determination to save her life and, at the same time, carry out a purpose of my own, which caused me to act as I did. The child was carried off by my sister to a remote part of the country, and there brought up under her care, passing as her niece and mine, and not till the other day did she herself know aught to the contrary. She is now of age, and the time has at length come for her to claim the rights which you defrauded her out of so many years ago, believing, when you did so, that you had robbed her of her life as well as her patrimony."

Major Sulgrave lay back in his chair, a helplessly inert lump of humanity. For a moment his eyes crossed fire with those of Penrose, but only to drop the next before the coldly implacable gaze of his new-found enemy. Mentally and physically he reeled, as it were, under the blow which the other had just aimed at him. He flung out his arms for help, but they grasped nothing save empty air.

"And yet you sold yourself to me," his dry lips at length contrived to stammer. "You took my money under a promise to do a certain

thing; so that, by your own showing, you are no better than a common swindler."

"Not so. Had I not put a price on my supposed services, you would have become suspicious that, in some way or other, I was hoodwinking you. The bank-notes you gave me from time to time, all of which I insisted on your endorsing with your initials and the dates on which they passed into my hands, are locked up in my safe, where they have lain untouched for years, and to-morrow they shall be given back to you: you doubtless thought, when I left Wincaster and bought a practice in London, that it was with your blood-money I paid for it. It was a very natural conclusion for you to come to. In reality, my means were derived from a legacy left me by a distant relative."

Utterly dazed and confounded, the Major listened like a man in a dream. He had no words at his command wherewith to express a tithe of the feelings which were raging dumbly within him. Ruin, complete and irretrievable, stared him in the face. What had he ever done to this man to make of him an enemy so implacable, so slow of vengeance, but so sure of stroke now that the day of reckoning was here? Not long had he to wait for an answer to the question he thus put to himself.

"I told you just now," resumed Penrose, who in the eyes of the cowering wretch before him seemed to be both judge and executioner in one, "that in acting as I did, I had a certain purpose of my own to accomplish, a certain end to serve. What that was I will now tell you. Go back in memory, Harold Sulgrave, to a summer twenty years ago, while your brother was still alive, when you came to Langley Prior on a visit, and then tell me whether any recollection lingers in your mind of a certain girl, Ann Marsh by name. Ah! I see that you have not quite forgotten her, though doubtless you have striven your hardest to do so. Well; I loved that girl (though the world knew it not), and would have made her my wife, had not you come between us, and deliberately set yourself to accomplish her undoing. You succeeded but too well, as the last act of the tragedy proved. Betrayed and deserted, Ann sought a refuge for all her wrongs in the Upper Mill Pool, while you went on your way, smilingly indifferent. It was then that I swore to be revenged on you, whatsoever the cost to myself might be. After a while the chance came to my hand in a way such as in my wildest dreams I had never anticipated. You gave yourself away to me, and it only rested with me to determine after what fashion I could best work out my scheme of vengeance to the bitter end. In what way I have succeeded in doing so, you have now been told. The girl whom I snatched from the cruel death to which you had doomed her, is of age, and beyond your control. You, who have tasted the sweets of wealth for so many years, will now go back to that poverty and obscurity, the sting of which ate so bitterly into your soul in days

gone by, and which will now seem twice as bitter by contrast. Your son is engaged to be married to a daughter of the Earl of Letchford. Will that wedding take place now? I trow not. Ann Marsh is avenged!"

The Major was roused at last.

"Matthew Penrose," he said with slow, envenomed intensity, and with a murderous, half insane gleam in his eyes, "had I but brought my revolver with me, I would have shot you dead where you sit before me!"

A contemptuous laugh broke from the doctor's lips. "No, Harold Sulgrave, you would have done nothing of the kind," he said. "In the first place, you are an arrant coward; and, in the second, before you could have raised your hand, my faithful Bruno here would have had his fangs in your throat, and after that——" A significant shrug finished the sentence.

CHAPTER V.

Basil Gilmour, on alighting from the train at Trewella, at once engaged the only fly the little station could boast of, to take him to Elderbank, so great was his hurry to see Evie again. He had kept his rooms on, and he now drove round by way of them, in order to rid himself of his portmanteau, and, at the same time, notify his return to his landlady.

Every one who has visited Trewella knows that the quaint little town lies low and sheltered on the inland side of a long line of cliffs, broken here and there by combes, or small valleys, the seaward fronts of which have for untold ages stemmed the full force of the Atlantic. Here and there, along the road which wound upward from the valley in which the town is built to the wind-swept plateau above, was to be seen a small villa, or cottage *ornée*, each standing in its own garden, or tiny belt of shrubbery. Of these pleasant domiciles Elderbank was one.

Gilmour alighted at the gate, and paid and dismissed the flyman. His heart beat high with hope and joyful expectancy as his eyes scanned the front of the house in search of the face he loved so well; but only the blank windows stared back at him. "Perhaps she is out—gone into the town, or for an afternoon stroll along the cliffs," he said to himself, a few rapid strides taking him across the lawn to the front door. His hand was on the knocker, when the door was opened from within, and Miss Penrose confronted him, but so changed and aged, that she looked at least a dozen years older than when Gilmour had seen her last.

"You have found her—you have brought me news of her! Is it not so?" she cried, with a pitiful eagerness in her voice, before the young painter had time to say a word.

"Found her! Found whom, Miss Penrose?" he demanded. "I have come in search of Evie; is she not here?"

"Then you do not know—you have not heard?" wailed the spinster. "And I thought you had come, like a good angel, to bring me tidings of her! But come inside, there is no one in the house but myself and Martha."

Hardly knowing whether he was awake or dreaming, but with a sickening dread at his heart, he followed her into the pleasant little parlour, which only on two previous occasions had it been his privilege to enter. Hardly had he crossed the threshold before Miss Penrose turned, and, with a gesture which had in it the touching recognition of a common loss, laid a hand on each of his shoulders.

"Oh, Mr. Gilmour," she cried, "my darling is gone—lost—lost and nowhere to be found!" And with that she burst into a passion of tears.

"Gone!—lost!" exclaimed Basil in a tone of stupefaction. "For Heaven's sake, Miss Penrose, tell me what you mean!"

But just then the poor lady was incapable of another word, her sobs shook her from head to foot; so Basil, taking her gently by the hand, led her to the sofa, and seated himself beside her. What she had to tell him, as soon as she could command herself sufficiently, was to the following purport:

It was now Thursday. On Monday afternoon Evie had left home, taking a book with her, and announcing her intention of going for her favourite walk along the cliffs as far as St. Bridget's Bay and back, going and coming making together a distance of about five miles. Her aunt went with her, as she not infrequently did, as far as the point where the road which led up from the valley joined the foot-path which ran along the summit of the cliffs, and then left her, the girl going on her way alone.

It was a still, slightly overcast September afternoon, and the tide was creeping in with a long, slow, oily swell. St. Bridget's Bay, for which Evie was bound, was well known to Basil. It was formed by a break in the sea frontage of the cliffs, and was backed by a lovely wooded glen, which struck inland for a quarter of a mile or more, and through which, dropping by many a miniature cascade, ran a purling stream of purest water, till it was finally dispersed and lost among the sands of the bay. Here Basil had often come to sketch during the summer just ended, and, above all, here it was he had first whispered in Evie's ear that he loved her!

From the time Miss Penrose and Evie parted on Monday afternoon nothing more had been seen, or was known, of the girl. She had never returned home, and no tidings of her were forthcoming. Both the local constabulary and the mounted county force had been communicated with, and a search party, among the fishermen and others, organised; one section taking the glen and its surroundings, while the other devoted itself to the shore and the bays for miles in

both directions; but, so far, without the shadow of a result. Well might poor Miss Penrose be half distracted.

Gilmour's distraction was no whit less poignant than that of the spinster, in addition to which he was overborne and weighed down by a sense of his utter helplessness, of his inability, not merely to *do* anything, but even to suggest anything worth acting upon in a conjuncture so strange and unprecedented, which of itself was enough to madden him. If the forces already at work had been able to effect nothing, what likelihood was there that his services, even if he had known in what direction to put them to the proof, would be of the slightest avail? All his heart within him was crying out to be up and doing, and there was nothing for him to do! The air of the little room seemed to stifle him.

"You have, of course, communicated with your brother, Miss Penrose?" he said at length, when the silence was fast becoming intolerable.

"Oh, yes; I telegraphed to Matthew as soon as ever the office was open on Tuesday morning, but I have had no reply—none whatever. I can't make it out at all, and if——Why, I do believe that is the telegraph boy at the gate!"

And so, indeed, it proved. Dr. Penrose's reply to his sister's message was brief, but to the point:

"Found telegram awaiting my return from special case in country. Will be with you at earliest possible moment."

Miss Penrose brightened visibly. Her faith in her brother and his capabilities was so thorough. She had been so used to rely upon him, and to find that at his touch all her little difficulties and dilemmas vanished as if by magic, that the announcement of his proximate arrival was enough to make her feel as if half her burden were already lifted off her shoulders. If neither the police nor anybody else could succeed in tracing Evie, Matthew would not fail to do so!

But to Basil Gilmour the doctor's message brought no such comfort. Oh, to be compelled to sit there, helpless and inactive, when at that very moment his darling might be——! It seemed to him as if his brain must give way.

Moodily he paced the little parlour, his hands buried deep in his pockets, searching vainly in his mind for some ray of light, some beckoning finger to point out the way he should go. But all around him was a blackness as of a dungeon at midnight.

He was alone, Miss Penrose having slipped quietly out of the room some minutes before, when the sudden creaking of the garden-gate cut his sombre reverie as with a knife. His heart gave a great leap. What if it were Evie come back! A couple of strides took him to the window.

No, there was no Evie there, but, instead, three people, all strangers to him. The one who led the way towards the front door

was a man in uniform; following him came a middle-aged, careworn woman; while the rear was brought up by a shambling, vacant-looking youth of eighteen or twenty. Gilmour's heart sank, but only to rise with a bound a moment later. "Although Evie herself has not come back," something whispered to him, "may not these people have brought tidings of her?"

And such, in fact, proved to be the case, when the party of three had been ushered by Miss Penrose into the sitting-room.

The man in uniform was none other than Superintendent Fosdyke, chief of the Trewella police; the woman, a person in a very humble way of life, was known among her neighbours as the Widow Scarbin; while the youth was her son, Tony. The story that was now unfolded to the wondering ears of Miss Penrose and Gilmour, with Fosdyke for its principal mouthpiece, was, indeed, a singular one. But before entering on it, it may be as well to devote a few words to Tony Scarbin.

That Tony was not "all there," as the phrase goes—in other words, that he was only half-witted—everybody that knew him was pretty well agreed. In point of fact, he was one of those strange compounds of simplicity and cunning, which puzzle those who know them best to say where one ends and the other begins.

But Tony had a further claim on the forbearance and compassion of his fellows: he was a born mute. As with others so situated, he had gradually learnt or had been taught to make known his wants and wishes, and to give expression to his very limited range of ideas, by means of what is commonly known as the deaf-and-dumb alphabet; that is to say, he made use of his fingers instead of his tongue, in communicating with the few people to whom his language of signs was not a sealed mystery; among those few, fortunately for Tony, being his mother.

Tony filled the post of messenger and errand-runner in chief to the good folk of Trewella. Not only did he know everybody, young and old, in the town, but there was not a sheep-path or trackway across the moors for miles around with which he was not acquainted.

Thus it fell out that when lawyer Escombe found himself in need of a messenger to carry a letter to Findorn Grange, fifteen miles across the hills, he naturally sent for Tony Scarbin.

It was on Monday afternoon that Tony set out on his errand. He was to stay over-night at his destination, and return with an answer on the morrow. As it happened, however, the answer was not forthcoming till a couple of days later, during which time Tony was fed and lodged at the Grange, so that not till early on Thursday afternoon did he get back to Trewella.

He had delivered the return letter into the lawyer's hands, had been liberally paid, and was partaking of an early tea with his mother, when the news with which all Trewella was ringing was told him—the news of the disappearance of Miss Eveline Penrose of Elderbank.

As a matter of course, Tony knew Eveline; but he not merely knew her, he worshipped her. Her beauty appealed to some dim and heretofore unawakened sense within him, arousing vague delicious feelings and emotions, which but for her might have lain dormant for ever. Whenever he encountered Eveline, it was as though some strange beautiful bird awoke in his heart and began to flutter its wings and beat against the bars of its cage in a vain endeavour to escape, and it was not till hours afterwards, that poor Tony's customary stolid composure would come back to him.

Many, too, were the sixpences which Eveline had given him out of sheer compassion, and without asking any service in return, although he would gladly have gone through fire and water to serve her. But not one kindness she had ever done the poor "natural" was by him forgotten.

Mrs. Scarbin was retailing the news to her son simply as news, and because it happened to be the subject uppermost in her thoughts; but hardly had his slow perception taken in the fact that Miss Eveline had been missing since Monday and could nowhere be found, before he started excitedly to his feet, and his fingers began to work at such a rate, that even Mrs. Scarbin's practised eyes could with difficulty follow them. He could tell something about Miss Eveline; he had seen her on Monday afternoon after leaving Trewella.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Scarbin put on her bonnet, and bidding her son follow her, took her way to the police-station; as a result of which step on her part, Superintendent Fosdyke, the widow, and Tony, now found themselves at Elderbank.

What the chief constable, as Tony's mouthpiece, had to tell, was at once strange and disquieting.

After leaving Trewella on Monday afternoon, Tony's road lay for about three miles along the crown of the cliff, after which he would have to strike inland, and make the best of his way across country to his destination.

When he had got as far as the head of the thickly-wooded combe which led down to St. Bridget's Bay, he sat down, as he told his mother, to rest awhile; but according to his own confession later on, it was less with the view of resting, than of snatching "a fearful joy." The fact was that, early in the day, he had been on an errand for Mrs. Tubbs, the tobacconist, who had rewarded him with a couple of cheap cigars, and it was in order to smoke one of these in secret, that Tony found a seat for himself under a clump of brushwood at the head of the glen. It was his first cigar, and the effect was scarcely such as he had anticipated. For a time, indeed, mundane matters interested him not at all.

When at length he was able to open his eyes and sit up and look about him, the first thing he saw was Miss Eveline Penrose coming in leisurely fashion along the cliffs in the direction of the combe, carrying a book in one hand, and her sunshade in the other.

Then he became aware that, following the same line of footpath, but at a distance of about a quarter of a mile, was another female whom he at once recognised as a stranger he had several times seen during the last few days, either in or about the town, and who, as it was afterwards found, had hired a lodging for a week in the cottage of Michael Annis, a retired master mariner, which partly overlooked the grounds of Elderbank.

Tony sat without stirring till Miss Penrose, having followed the footpath to the edge of the combe, but at a point some distance from where he lay *perdu*, dipped swiftly down with it and, a moment later, was lost to view among the thick foliage below.

Tony was about to rise and go on his way, when his attention was arrested by a singular action on the part of the woman who had been following Miss Penrose. Scarcely had Evie disappeared before she came to a halt, and after gazing around her on every side as though to satisfy herself that no one was in sight, she turned her face seaward and drawing as near the edge of the cliff as it was safe to venture, produced from some pocket, what looked like a big white handkerchief, and waved it several times above her head, as if signalling to some one below. That done, she sat down on the short grass, and took no share in anything that followed.

Not only was Tony's curiosity aroused, some instinct seemed to warn him that danger threatened his darling Miss Penrose. Every tree and bush in the combe was known to him, he could have found his way to any given point of it on the darkest night. What he did now was to part the underwood carefully, and make his way forward as stealthily as a hunter on the trail, till he had reached a certain coign of vantage whence, himself unseen, he had an unimpeded view of the sands and the bay beyond.

Even Tony's dull brain felt a shock of surprise when, from his hiding-place, he beheld a yawl at anchor in lonely St. Bridget's Bay; no vessel, big or little, to his knowledge, having ever anchored there before. But scarcely had this strange fact time to impress itself on his mental retina, before a dingy, with two men in it, put off from the yawl, leaving a third man on board. Three minutes later the dingy was beached on the sands and the men stepped ashore.

CHAPTER VI.

What had become of Miss Eveline Penrose? and was the coming ashore of the two men in any way connected with her presence in the combe? Such, or such like, were the questions Tony put to himself after his broken, inarticulate fashion. Had it not been for a vague dread of something happening to her, he would have gone on his way without a further thought for the yawl and its crew.

About three parts of the way down was the loveliest nook in the whole combe.

Here, under the shade of a silver birch, a rustic seat had been placed for the behoof of tired wayfarers and others, and here it seemed to Tony most likely that Miss Eveline would be found. Five minutes later he had made his way to another thick clump of undergrowth on the opposite side of the combe and nearly fronting the rustic seat.

Yes, there she sat, her book and sunshade beside her; and there, also, were the two men from the yawl, one of whom was at that moment addressing her, while the other stood in a respectful attitude a little distance away. Presently the one who was talking, who wore a gold band round his peaked cap and was evidently a gentleman, drew a paper from his pocket and, with a little bow, handed it to Miss Eveline.

As soon as she had read it she rose quickly to her feet and pressed one hand to her head like one doubtful and perplexed. Then the man spoke to her again, pointing at the same time to the yawl. Then Miss Eveline took a few steps in the direction indicated, but presently came to a halt as if her mind were not finally made up.

Once more the man spoke to her, this time with added emphasis and more gesticulation than he had employed before. Apparently, what he now said served to convince her. She seemed to hesitate no longer, but without once looking back, walked down to the bay and was assisted into the dingy, the two men following her. Before many minutes had passed, the yawl, her one sail set to catch whatever air there was, was forging slowly out of St. Bridget's Bay, having Miss Eveline aboard her.

Then Tony Scarbin, having seen all there was to see, turned his face inland and went his way.

Miss Penrose and Gilmour stared at each other in amazement and dismay, when chief-constable Fosdyke had brought his narrative to an end, which Tony had not failed to punctuate, as it were, at frequent intervals with emphatic nods of his head.

"What we should like to find out," resumed Fosdyke presently, "is the name and address of the gent with the gold-laced cap. I suppose now, ma'am, you can't even give a guess as to his identity?"

Miss Penrose shook her head pathetically. She had never been good at guessing anything, and just now, as she told herself, her brains were all in a muddle.

"If we could get an accurate description of the man, it might help us materially," went on the chief constable; "but I suppose it's hopeless to look for anything of the kind from our friend Tony."

The widow Scarbin pricked up her ears.

"There's more in Tony than most folk think for," she said. "Just let me understand clearly what you want, and then maybe——"

In a few words Fosdyke told her how the case stood.

"If Tony ain't good at describing folk in one way, he's rare and clever in another. You just get me a bit of lead pencil and a sheet of paper, and you shall see." The required articles were quickly forthcoming. Turning to her son, the widow said, "Tony, Mr. Fosdyke wants a likeness of the gent with the gold lace round his cap who gave the paper to the young lady to read."

A flash of keen intelligence, which to Gilmour was nothing less than startling, leapt into the "natural's" eyes. It was as though two lamps had been suddenly lighted in the windows of a darkened room. Taking the pencil and paper, Tony, with a few bold incisive touches, proceeded to fill in the features of the likeness one by one. At the end of two minutes he had put in the last stroke; then he thrust the paper across the table to Fosdyke.

That functionary took up the drawing, glanced at it and shook his head; it awoke no chord in his memory. Then he passed it on to Miss Penrose, whose spectacles were already astride her nose. Her eyes and Gilmour's took in the drawing at the same moment, and at the same moment a like exclamation broke from the lips of each: "Major Sulgrave!"

Then they started apart and stared at each other in blank amazement. Gilmour was the first to recover himself.

"Pardon the question, dear Miss Penrose," he said, "but may I ask whether *you* are acquainted with Major Sulgrave?"

"Am I not!" she exclaimed with a compression of her thin lips. "Not that I ever set eyes on him but once, and that seventeen long years ago. But that once was enough for a lifetime." Then, in French, she added: "He is Eveline's uncle—her father's brother. When she was three years old he tried to compass her death, and would have done so had not my brother rescued her from his hands. And you, Mr. Gilmour, what do you know of this *scélérat*?"

Never in his life had Gilmour been so dumfounded. Sulgrave Eveline's uncle! Not even Tony was more helplessly mute than he for the next few moments. Then, with a great effort, he pulled himself together and, also speaking in French, said: "Major Sulgrave is my stepfather, and the villain who broke my dear mother's heart. If there is one man in the world I hate and abhor, he is that man!"

"And to think that my darling Evie has fallen into his hands?" wailed Miss Penrose, reverting to her native language. "Remembering what he would have done to her years ago, what may he not do to her now? Oh! Mr. Gilmour, what is to be done?—what *is* to be done?"

But for the moment Gilmour did not reply; indeed, it seemed doubtful whether he heard her. He was groping in the dim recesses of his memory after an elusive recollection which for a single instant had flashed itself upon him, only to escape him the next.

Mr. Fosdyke was again eyeing Tony's sketch. "Ah," he muttered

to himself, "I suppose they recognised the fellow by that gash in his upper lip. But I should imagine the likeness to be a good one in other ways. I had no notion Master Tony was half so clever."

Gilmour lifted his head and the perplexed look vanished from his face. "Does any one here know whether there is a place, or building known as St. Ninian's Tower in this part of the country?" he asked.

Although the question was a general one, Fosdyke apparently took it as being addressed directly to him. "I have never, to my knowledge, heard the name before," he said with a shake of his head. "But it must be borne in mind that I've only known this part of the country for a matter of eighteen months, since I came here fresh from Exeter."

Meanwhile Tony had touched his mother's elbow, and his fingers were now talking away to her at a rapid rate. Presently Mrs. Scarbin said, "My boy tells me that he knows St. Ninian's Tower. It's some sixteen or eighteen miles from here across the moors, and stands all by itself close to the sea."

"Good!" said Gilmour. "Now, Tony, do you think that if I were to hire a horse and trap and take you with me, you could guide me the nearest way to St. Ninian's?"

Tony's answer was three affirmative nods of his overgrown head.

"Good!" said Gilmour for the second time. Then he turned to Fosdyke. "Both Miss Penrose and I have recognised the person in whose company Miss Eveline Penrose went away in the yawl. His name is Major Sulgrave, and he is, or used to be, the owner of the building—little more, I believe, than a ruin—know as St. Ninian's Tower. Now, I think it most likely it was to that place that the young lady was taken, at least in the first instance, although I confess myself wholly at a loss to know by what means she was induced to go. What, then, I intend to do is to hire a horse and trap and set out for St. Ninian's with the least possible delay, taking Tony to show me the way; and if you can spare one of your men to accompany me—for it is impossible to say what eventualities may arise—I shall esteem it a favour."

"Give me half-an-hour to make my arrangements, and I will go with you myself," was Fosdyke's prompt rejoinder.

It was already dusk when the three men started. Gilmour drove and had Tony—to whom he had lent an old travelling ulster—on the box seat beside him to point out the road. The back seat was occupied by Fosdyke, who had discarded his uniform for a plain suit of clothes. Gilmour's last words before quitting Elderbank were a promise to its mistress to send back Tony with news as soon as he had any to send. Needless to say, a silent but fervid prayer for his success followed him on his way.

Then one slow hour after another wore itself to an end till ten o'clock had come and gone. Miss Penrose was on the point of

sending Martha to the railway station to ascertain whether there would be another train from London before morning, when, for the second time that day, the solitary station fly drew up at the gate of Elderbank Never had the sight of her brother been so welcome to her as a that moment.

Miss Penrose knew of old that Matthew had scant patience with the usual feminine style of narration, and the story she had to unfold was told with laudable brevity. "That villain Sulgrave has a hand in this!" exclaimed the doctor even before any mention had been made of what Tony had been a witness of in the combe.

Penrose drew a long breath when at length his sister came to an end. "And do you mean to say," he demanded, "that this artist fellow who is running after Eveline is Harold Sulgrave's stepson?"

"Such is what he avows himself to be."

"Wonders will never cease! That, however, at present is a matter of small moment. What is of infinitely greater consequence is that Major Sulgrave is at the bottom of the girl's abduction, for that it is nothing less than an abduction I cannot doubt. But there is one sinister feature of the affair of which, as yet, no one but myself knows anything."

He got up from his seat and began to pace the little room with his hands behind his back, even as Gilmour had paced it several hours before. His sister, who knew his moods, refrained from speaking. She could see that, in his restrained and undemonstrative way, he was deeply moved.

Suddenly he stopped in front of her and, without removing his hands from behind him, said: "Drusilla, did I ever mention to you that Sulgrave called upon me in London one day about a couple of months ago?"

"No, Matthew, you never spoke of it. If you had, I should have remembered."

"Well, he *did* call upon me. Came to consult me about his health, having been recommended to do so by his own medical man. I made a careful examination of him, got his answers to a number of questions I put to him, and dismissed him with the assurance that there was nothing seriously the matter with him. Drusilla, I told him a lie—told it him of set purpose! My examination of Sulgrave revealed to me undoubted signs of incipient brain disease of a serious kind; such, in point of fact, as would be not unlikely, before the lapse of any long time, to develop into an acute form of mania, not improbably complicated with homicidal tendencies. And this is the man, Drusilla, who has got our poor girl into his clutches!"

His voice broke and he turned abruptly away. Never had his sister seen him so profoundly moved.

As the full import of his words, which at first she had failed to realise, made itself clear to her, horror and dread unspeakable kept her dumb. To the fear of she knew not what, which had held her in

its grip before, a veritable nightmare was now superadded. Then, in a little while, tears came to her relief, as they had come so often in the course of the last few days. But she wept silently, knowing how distasteful such displays were to her brother. He, on his part, had resumed his slow monotonous pacing to and fro.

"Oh, Matthew, what is to be done?" asked the poor lady at length, to whom any long space of silence was always irksome.

"Nothing *can* be done—nothing whatever till morning. If you want to occupy your mind, pray for speedy news and good news." Presently he added: "The most sensible thing for us to do is to go to bed and get as much rest as possible, for we know not what we may be called upon to go through to-morrow. So, if you will give me my candlestick——"

It has already been told how, when Major Sulgrave took up his permanent abode at Langley Prior, he left his wife and stepson behind on the Continent, Mrs. Sulgrave, indeed, having refused to live under the same roof with him any longer. He had long before dissipated the fortune she had brought him, all except an income of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, the capital of which he was unable to touch.

This he now grudgingly supplemented with an equivalent sum, paid quarterly, which was the utmost he would allow her out of his rent-roll of eight thousand a year. The double income, however, being enough for mother and son to subsist on in tolerable comfort, Sulgrave never saw his wife again. When word that she was dying reached Langley Prior, he was from home, and he only reached Rouen in time to follow her body to the grave. Basil, at that time a high-spirited youth of eighteen, with a heart embittered by a knowledge of his mother's wrongs, wholly declined having anything further to do with his step-father, who, on his part, was probably not sorry to have finally done with one whom he had always regarded as a thorn in his side. Basil had an aunt living in London who offered him a home, and to her he went. He and the Major parted at Mrs. Sulgrave's graveside and had never met since.

But when Basil recognised the original of Tony's pencil sketch, which he did the instant he set eyes on it, and when with such recognitions he coupled the astounding fact just revealed to him that the Major was Evie's uncle, and that she herself was the little heiress about whose (supposed) death he had often heard his mother talk; and when, in addition, another significant circumstance stared him in the face, that it was with Sulgrave Evie had gone away in the yawl;—when all these things began to piece themselves mentally together, there came over him a vague recollection of having heard his mother speak of a solitary tower, overlooking the sea, situated, too, in that part of the country, as being the property of the Major, and a place to which he generally betook himself for a few weeks' fishing in the course of each summer.

Following up the train of thought thus happily struck, he presently called to mind the fact that the place in question was known as St. Ninian's Tower, as also that his mother had stayed there for a week in the course of the summer but one following her marriage.

But when Basil had got thus far, there came like a flash the question which fixed him with such instant resolution: Might not St. Ninian's Tower be the spot to which Major Sulgrave had carried off his niece?

St. Ninian's Tower, as it was called, although nobody seemed to know why, was a rudely-built hexagonal structure with no architectural pretensions of any kind. Of the date of its erection, and by whom and for what purpose it had been built, there seemed to be no authentic information forthcoming. It is enough to state that it had formerly belonged to the Bolderos, and together with a small old-fashioned farmhouse which stood no great distance from it, and about forty acres of poorish land, had come to Major Sulgrave by inheritance through his mother.

The manor house in the valley a mile or more away, untenanted for years and now fast falling into disrepair, had been the home of the Bolderos for several generations. They and the Arkenshaws had been the two chief families in that part of the county, each having its own vault under the little roofless church of St. Ninian's, which stood within a bowshot of the Tower. No services had been held in the church within the memory of man, save those connected with the funeral of one or other members of the families in question.

In a tiny cottage just beyond the precincts of the ancient burying-ground dwelt all alone a cripple, Barney Groome by name, whose duty was that of custodian of what remained of the church, but more especially of the vaults below it wherein slept so many dead and gone Bolderos and Arkenshaws. Of the former family the only one of the name now living was a maiden lady of eighty, who for the last half century had made her home at Bath.

The Tower, its age notwithstanding, was by no means in a ruinous condition, but comprised three rooms, one above the other, of which the two upper ones, with their panelling of black oak, were still in a fair state of preservation.

As for the ground floor room, it had long been used by the people at the farm as a storage place for fuel and all sorts of lumber which had no recognised place of their own. Access to the rooms above was obtained by means of a couple of rude wooden staircases. Higher still was the leaded roof of the Tower which could only be reached through a trap-door. The two oak-panelled rooms, each of which was lighted by three or four narrow glazed openings high up in the wall, scarcely bigger than loopholes, were fitted up with a few plain articles of furniture and were kept solely for Major Sulgrave's use when he stayed at the Tower on the occasion of his fishing expeditions.

Finally, it may be mentioned that the farmhouse was tenanted by a man named Amos Gribble, together with his wife, his son and one serving woman.

CHAPTER VII.

THE nearest way to St. Ninian's from Trewella was across the moors, but the road was little better than a sheep-track, and was one which no kind of conveyance could have traversed, unless it were a South African trek-waggon drawn by a team of bullocks.

As a consequence, the road which Gilmour and his companions were obliged to take led them a long way inland and lengthened the distance between the two points by several miles. The church clock was striking ten as they reached the little hamlet of Barnslade. Here, by means of sundry signs and gestures, Tony intimated to Gilmour that they should put up the horse and trap and do the remainder of their journey on foot, a suggestion which the latter at once proceeded to carry into effect.

Horse and vehicle were left in charge of the ostler at the Red Lion, from whom Gilmour ascertained that St. Ninian's was only a mile and a half farther on.

Before long the road began to dip gently down towards the sea, and then presently the faint dull booming of the incoming tide broke the quietude of the night. In silence they walked on till, at a turn of the road, they came suddenly on the Tower of St. Ninian where it loomed darkly against the starlit sky.

Gilmour's heart leaped up at sight of it; fresh life seemed poured into his veins. Leaving his companions at the corner of the lane to await his return, he went on a reconnoitring expedition which took him the circuit of the Tower. Black and silent it stood, with no single ray of light, or rather token of human tenancy visible. The heavy oaken door which gave access to it was securely fastened by means of a huge padlock.

By this time all the young man's elation had died out of him. Could it be possible that the Major had not brought Eveline to the Tower at all? or was it merely that he, Basil, had come too late, and that she had been bestowed otherwhere? Miss Penrose's sinister avowal that the Major had tried to compass Evie's death when a child kept ringing in his ears. He shuddered to think what might have happened to her between Monday and now.

But not for a moment did he dream of going back to Trewella without some certain tidings of one kind or another.

He had spied a light shining through a chink in the shutters of one of the ground-floor windows of the farm, which might be taken as a proof that all its inmates had not yet retired for the night, and his mind was at once made up what to do. After a few words with Fosdyke, who, together with Tony, still kept in the background, he walked up to the farmhouse door, and knocked boldly.

Apparently his summons had the effect of startling the inmates. By pressing his ear to the door, he could just make out, that a low muttered conversation was being carried on inside, which, however, presently died into silence.

Then Gilmour knocked again, louder than before, and a minute later footsteps came to the door, which was now unbolted and opened, but only as far as the chain, which still held it, would allow of. Thus framed, what Gilmour saw, was the face and form of a woman verging on middle age, who carried a lighted candle in one hand which she shielded from the draught with the other. It was a hard, almost repulsive-looking face, with a net-work of wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, and a down-drawing of the corners of the mouth as of one whose life was one long grumble and complaint.

The woman peered out at Gilmour with what seemed to him like a mixture of distrust and defiance.

"I have called to see Major Sulgrave on a very special matter," began Basil. "Can you tell me whether he is at home?"

The woman's start at the mention of the Major's name did not escape the young painter.

"Why have you come here to ask for Major Sulgrave? This is not his home."

"I am quite aware of that, but I am also aware that he is or has been quite lately staying here."

"I've no call to answer any questions about Major Sulgrave—unless——"

Here her eyes seemed again to take in the young man from head to foot.

"Unless you know something about the person who puts the questions," remarked Basil blandly. "Just so. One should never encourage idle impertinence. Allow me, therefore, to inform you that my name is Basil Gilmour" (here is my card), "and that I am Major Sulgrave's step-son—that is to say, he married my mother, and that, consequently, he and I are near relatives."

Some of the suspicion seemed at once to die out of the woman's face. "Oh! if you are a relation of the Major, that makes a lot of difference, and there can be no harm in my telling you that he has gone fishing."

"In the yawl," interpolated Basil as a guess.

"Yes, in the yawl," responded the woman with a nod. "My husband and son are with him, and goodness only knows at what hour of the night, or morning, they will get back."

"In that case there's no help for it, and I must put off seeing him till to-morrow. If, now, I were to call about nine in the morning—or would that be too early?"

"It all depends what time the yawl gets back. The Major might or might not be up by that time. You would have to take your chance."

Thereupon Basil thanked the woman, bade her good night, and went his way.

Having rejoined Fosdyke, the two held a brief consultation, as a result of which, it was decided that they should at once retrace their way to the inn at Barnslade, that a fresh horse should be obtained, and that Tony should then drive back to Elderbank, taking with him a note written by Basil informing Dr. Penrose—who, he calculated, would be sure to reach Trewella by the last train—of what he had thus far discovered; to wit, that Major Sulgrave was quartered at the Tower, and, further, that it was the writer's intention to seek an interview with him at an early hour on the morrow.

This note, he did not doubt, would bring the doctor back with Tony without an hour's delay.

Thus reinforced, they ought to be able, Penrose, Fosdyke, and himself, to force Sulgrave into a corner, from which his only chance of escape would be by revealing what had become of Eveline. They had proof positive that she had gone away with him in the yawl on Monday, and should he now refuse to disclose her whereabouts, it seemed to Basil that their next step ought to be to lay an information before the nearest magistrate and obtain a search warrant, which Fosdyke, as a police official, would be able to carry into effect there and then.

Such was the plan now agreed on between the two men, and one which they would doubtless have proceeded to put into operation, had not something happened at this juncture which, in the result, served to upset all their proposed arrangements and led up to a *denouement* of the strangest and most unexpected kind.

It was Tony who, by nudging the superintendent, first drew attention to what at once concentrated on itself the eyes of all three.

What they saw was a speck of yellow light some distance away from where they were standing, which, after moving in a strangely irregular up-and-down fashion across a small space of darkness, presently came to a point where it remained stationary. The night was still and windless, and the light, whether that of a candle or a lamp, seemed to burn without the faintest flicker.

Fosdyke's detective instincts at once came into play. After a whisper to the others, he stole quietly forward, keeping carefully to the grass-grown borders of the narrow country road. A few seconds later Basil and Tony followed in his footsteps.

The sight they came upon was in no wise a startling one. Indeed, it could hardly have been termed other than commonplace had not the spot been such as it was and the hour so close on midnight, which, taken together, lent the scene a certain element of weirdness. What they beheld was a deformed man—one of his legs was shorter than the other, and a crutch rested against the wall close by—who was gathering together a bundle of firewood under a small wooden shed or lean-to, the tin oil-lamp he had brought with him meanwhile resting

on a bench close by and serving to bring the man's features into prominent relief. He was, in fact, none other than Barney Groome, the custodian of the church of St. Ninian, or of what was left of it, and of the vaults below.

"I seem to know that man's face," whispered Basil to Fosdyke, although unable for the moment to call to mind where he had seen it before.

All unwitting that three pairs of eyes were watching him, Barney Groome presently knotted the cord round his bundle of wood, and taking it and the lamp in one hand, and possessing himself of his crutch with the other, turned to go back to his cottage. Meanwhile Fosdyke had whispered to Basil: "If you know him, why not speak to him? He may be able to tell us something that will prove of use to us."

Accordingly Basil stepped a few paces forward and gave a preliminary cough, which so startled Barney that he dropped his bundle of wood, and very nearly his lamp into the bargain. "Heaven bless us! who's there?" he exclaimed in a quavering voice.

Then Basil went closer, till the light from the lamp shone full on him. "If I mistake not, you and I have met before," he said. "Were you not in the Grimthorpe railway accident?"

Barney peered up into the other's face. "Ah, now, sir, I recognise you," he said. "You are the gent that worked so hard to rescue me and others from the wreck of the train. It was you that brought me round with brandy from your own flask when I had fainted; and it was you that sent me this beautiful new crutch all the way from London, my other one having been smashed in the accident. (It was a mercy I wasn't smashed at the same time!) I've not forgotten your kindness, sir—no, nor ever shall forget it. But what brings you to a place like this, and at this time o' night, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"I am here to call upon Major Sulgrave, but I find he's gone out for a night's fishing."

"To call upon the Major?" said Barney in a dubious tone; "he's a queer customer to have aught to do with, is the Major."

"I understand his present visit to the Tower has lasted for some time. Can you tell me how long it is since you first set eyes on him?"

"Close on a fortnight ago."

"I suppose he goes out fishing a good deal?"

"Oh yes; he, and Amos Gribble, and the lad Joe set off most afternoons when the weather's at all likely, and as often as not don't get back till early morning."

"I suppose you can't tell me for certain whether or no the Major has a young lady staying with him at the Tower?" Basil's heart beat faster than usual as he put the question.

"What I *can* tell you as a fact is, that in the dusk of evening on

Monday last, a female—but whether young or old it was too dark for me to see—came ashore from the yawl, and walked with the Major up to the Gribbles' house."

"Yes—yes—and have you seen her since? Is she there now?"

"That was the first and last glimpse I had of her. I have seen no signs of her since."

"But might she not have been shut up in the Tower all this time without your being a bit the wiser?"

"If it comes to that, there might be half-a-dozen folk shut up in the Tower without my knowing aught about it."

Basil turned away. The information imparted by Groome was of the utmost importance. It brought home Eveline's abduction to Sulgrave even more irrefutably than before. Surely no magistrate would refuse to issue a search warrant in the face of such evidence as Dr. Penrose would now be in a position to lay before him! Tony must start for Trewella with the least possible delay.

All this passed through his mind in the course of a few seconds. Without being aware of it, he had turned, and was walking by Barney's side in the direction of the cottage, when an exclamation from his companion recalled him to time and place with a start.

"Great mercy!" exclaimed the cripple, coming to a sudden halt and pointing with his crutch. "Whatever's amiss at the Tower? Look!—look! Why, I do believe it's on fire."

At this juncture Fosdyke and Tony emerged from the background into the circle of light which radiated from Barney's lamp. The cripple accepted them without question as being companions of Gilmour. For a space of several seconds they all stood staring at the Tower like men suddenly turned to stone. The narrow windows of the ground floor room, unlike those of the upper stories, were unglazed. One of them now shone out with a dusky red glare, and it was the sight of this which had caused Barney to sound the note of alarm; while from the other, even as they were looking on, dimly discernible by the starlight, was unfurled a pennon of dense white smoke.

Basil's first attempt to speak resulted in a choking sob. Then setting his teeth hard and clenching his hands, he drew a deep breath.

"Follow me!" he exclaimed hoarsely, an instant later, and with that he darted away from the others like an arrow from a bow.

In no time, as it seemed to those left behind, they heard him knocking furiously at the farmhouse door, and calling aloud:

"Fire! fire! Help! help!"

Then a light became visible in one of the upper windows, and just as Fosdyke and Tony reached the door, it was opened from within and the white faces of two women, each of whom had thrown a shawl hurriedly over her shoulders, and one of whom carried a lighted candle, gave back stare for stare to the faces outside.

"Fire! Who called out fire?" demanded one of them fiercely of Basil. "What do you mean by frightening folk in this way?"

It was the same woman with whom he had spoken before.

"It's the Tower that's on fire—the Tower!" he cried, with a stamp of his foot. "And if——"

"The Tower!" broke from both the women.

It was more a scream of terror than an exclamation.

"Yes, Mrs. Gribble, that is so. The bottom room is all in flames."

It was Barney who now spoke. He had come limping up at his best pace after the others.

"O Heaven! and *she* locked up in there!" burst out Mrs. Gribble.

She had been white before, but now her lips turned blue and her eyes seemed as if they would start from her head.

"Locked up in the Tower!" burst from Basil, and for an instant he reeled against Fosdyke's burly form. His worst fears had come true. "The key, woman—the key this instant?" he cried. Then to himself, "Oh, my darling, my darling, pray Heaven it may not be too late!"

"The key," whimpered the woman, who now broke down utterly. "There is only one key, and the Major has it with him in the yawl."

It was as if a blow from an unseen power had smitten the three men. A groan broke from Basil; the others stood in a silence that seemed breathless while it lasted. Fosdyke was the first to break it.

"Then, in Heaven's name!" he exclaimed, "give us something with which we can break in the door of the Tower!"

The words roused Basil; he drew in his breath; his energy came back to him with a rush.

The door-chain had hitherto kept the outsiders at bay. The serving woman now undid it and she and her mistress fell back before Basil and the superintendent.

A couple of minutes sufficed to ransack the house. Nothing could they find that would help their purpose save an old-fashioned kitchen poker and a large hammer. Fosdyke shook his head, but only to brighten up a few moments later. In a shed at the back of the house he came across a stout piece of timber which had evidently been put there to be sawn up for firewood. Calling to Tony and pointing to the log, he and the "natural" hoisted it on their shoulders and started at a run for the Tower, only to find that Basil had reached there before them.

From the moment of Barney's discovery of the fire till their arrival at the Tower but a very few minutes had elapsed. But short as the time had been, it had sufficed to give the fire a still firmer hold. From each of the ground floor windows either quivering tongues of

flame, or dense puffs of smoke were now issuing. During the last quarter of an hour a light wind had begun to blow from the sea which carried the smoke inland. The whole of the windows in the upper stories still stared out blankly; not a gleam of light was visible in any of them. Could it be that Evie had retired for the night, Basil asked himself, and that even the fire had failed to arouse her? Or was it not more likely that she had been overcome by the smoke, which would not fail to ascend and fill the upper floors? Three times he made the circuit of the Tower, calling aloud at intervals with all the strength of his lungs, "Evie—Evie, where are you?" but the silence and darkness remained unbroken. Even if he could have reached to one or other of the upper windows by means of a ladder, of what avail would that have been? No human being bigger than a child of five could have forced its way through the narrow aperture. With a spasm of despair gnawing at his heart he went back to Fosdyke.

The superintendent and Tony were already at work, using the piece of timber as a ram with which to batter down the door. To their forces Basil now joined his; nothing else was left him to do; and, presently the heavy door fell inward with a crash. Basil's first impulse was to rush into the breach, as it were, to make a dash through the smoke and flames for the staircase which led to the next floor; but Fosdyke's firm grip on his collar was just in time to hold him back.

"You shall not go, Mr. Gilmour—you shall not!" he exclaimed. "It would be madness—death. You can see for yourself that the place is a regular furnace; you would never come out of it alive. And as for reaching the staircase, you may depend on it there's not as much of it left by this time as would serve to kindle a kitchen fire with."

Basil sank on his knees and buried his face in his hands. There seemed no help anywhere—none!

But he was mistaken, as we poor mortals so often are, even in the hour of our darkest extremity.

At this moment Barney Groome came limping up at a tremendous rate. He had only half-comprehended the meaning of all that had passed and had lingered behind for the sake of a few elucidatory words from Mrs. Gribble. He now laid a nervous hand on Basil's shoulder.

"Get up, sir, get up; there's not a moment to lose," he cried. He was trembling with excitement. "If I had but known half, ay, a quarter of an hour ago what I know now! But please Heaven, we may yet be in time."

By this time Basil was on his feet, confronting him. His half-maddened eyes asked the question his lips were powerless to frame.

"There's no time now for explanations," said Barney in reply to the mute appeal. "Every moment's precious. Follow me and trust me when I tell you that I know what I'm about."

He spoke with a quick nervous energy which seemed to transform him into another man.

It was astonishing with what celerity he could get over the ground when he was so minded. He now made direct for his own cottage, followed closely by Basil and Fosdyke. By the latter's directions Tony stayed behind at the Tower.

"Light the candles in these," said Barney to Fosdyke, pointing to a couple of lanterns on a shelf in his tiny kitchen. Then he himself disappeared, to return half a minute later, carrying a steel ring on which were strung a number of quaint keys of various shapes and sizes. Giving a lantern to each of the men, Barney, without a word, beckoned them to follow him, and so, after traversing a space of a couple of hundred yards, brought them to the ruins of the little church of St. Ninian and to a flight of moss-grown steps, some six or eight in number, as their lanterns revealed to them, abutting on the outer wall of the chancel. Down the steps went Barney, crutch and all. At the bottom he paused for a moment to select a certain key from his bunch, and having found it, proceeded therewith to open a low heavy-browed, nail-studded door. "If you please, gentlemen," he said to the others with a wave of his hand, who thereupon followed him down the steps.

"We are now in the family vault of the Bolderos. More than a score of 'em sleep their last sleep here under my charge. From this place a secret underground passage leads direct to the Tower, the existence of which is known only to old Miss Boldero and myself. It is said to have originated in the troubled days long ago, when first those who were for one side and then, maybe, a few years later, those who were for the other, had in turn to hide and make themselves scarce. But this is no time for talk. Gentlemen, you are stronger than I. Will you please put down your lanterns and remove this coffin to yonder vacant slab. It is that of Captain Geoffrey Boldero, the last comer here. A good man and true, if ever there was one! Thank you. Now you will find, on trying, that this slab can be lifted out of its sockets. That will do famously."

All this had taken up far less time than the reader might imagine.

The walls of the vault had at one time been whitewashed, but were now dingy with age and damp. To ordinary view there was nothing to distinguish the space, now rendered vacant by the removal of the slab, from any other part of the vault, but Barney soon proved that there *was* a difference, and a very remarkable one. Hidden by the thickness of the slab when in its place, was what by that dim light looked like a patch of mildew, but which was now shown to be a key-hole. Not a moment was lost in fitting it with its proper key, and a few seconds later a heavy iron door, painted to resemble the rest of the vault, yielding to Barney's pressure, swung sullenly back with a dull creaking sound on its rusty hinges, disclosing, as it did so, a narrow opening about six feet in height.

Taking up one of the lanterns, Barney motioned to Gilmour to take the other. "You, sir, will be all right if you follow close on the heels of this gentleman," he said to Fosdyke.

Then, with Barney as leader, they entered the opening in single file. Presently it broadened out a little, but nowhere was there room for two people to walk abreast. It was a work which must have cost both money and pains, and was as perfect to-day as when first completed. Its atmosphere was cool and slightly musty, but not otherwise unpleasant. At first the floor dipped somewhat till it reached a lower level, at which it kept till, finally, the passage was blocked abruptly by a steep flight of stone steps. Not a word had been spoken by any one, but now Barney, half turning, said, "Here we are, at the foot of the Tower. The door at the top of these steps opens on a hidden staircase built in the thickness of the wall."

Without more ado he hobbled up the steps, and with another key, selected from his bunch, opened the door at the head of them, and then by the light of the lanterns, Gilmour and Fosdyke saw before and above them the staircase of which Barney had spoken. It wound spirally round the Tower, and, still following Barney's lead, they began to climb it in the same silence as before.

Presently the third and last door was reached. Again Barney spoke. "This will admit us into the topmost room of the Tower, the one just under the leads. Here, if anywhere, the young lady should be found."

He was unlocking the door as he spoke. When opened, it disclosed to the straining eyes of the others what looked more like an old-fashioned clothes closet lined with dark wood than anything else. But the next moment Barney took two steps forward and pressed heavily with his thumb on a small metal knob. As he did so a large oaken panel fell noiselessly back as if withdrawn by an invisible hand and before them stood revealed the upper room of the Tower.

With a low sharp cry, Basil pushed past Barney and was first in the room. Setting down his lantern on the floor, he gazed around. The place was full of smoke, but not to any suffocating extent. The door which gave admission from the lower room was shut, and only through the narrow opening below it had the smoke been able slowly to penetrate. The furniture comprised a small round table, a couple of ordinary chairs, a cushioned easy-chair, and, in one corner, a couch. On that couch Eveline Sulgrave lay stretched, her cheek resting on the palm of one hand, to all appearance in a deep sleep.

Basil's eyes leapt to her in a moment; the next he was on one knee beside her. How he put his arms round her, how he pressed his lips to hers, all unheeding that he was not alone, and with what endearing terms he sought to rouse her, space is not ours to tell. It is enough to say that after a little while her eyes suddenly opened to their fullest extent. There was an instant's stare of wonder, then into them there stole a look of sweetest recognition.

"You—Basil!" she murmured, while her arm tightened round his neck. "I have been dreaming about you, dear." But even as the words left her lips her head sank backward and with a faint sigh she lapsed into unconsciousness.

"The smoke has been too much for her. We must get her into the fresh air as quickly as possible." So spake Barney.

A quarter of an hour later she was safe under the roof of the farmhouse. But it was not the smoke that had overcome her; there could be little doubt that her coffee had been drugged, and by Sulgrave himself. Later on, the serving-woman admitted having seen him pour something into the cup out of a phial, when he evidently thought himself unobserved.

Long before morning nothing of St. Ninian's Tower was left, save its bare calcined walls.

The yawl came in at daybreak, not with a haul of fish on board, but with a raging madman, bound with ropes to the thwarts of the boat. What Dr. Penrose had for some time foreseen had at length come to pass. The bulwarks of reason, which had long been tottering, had at last given way, and the maniac had leapt forth. Ever since Sulgrave's arrival at the Tower the Gribbles had noticed a certain strangeness both in his speech and manner, for which they were at a loss to account; still, no suspicion of the truth had ever entered their minds. On the Thursday evening the three men had gone out in the yawl as usual, but in the middle of the night, after the net had been cast, and while father and son were quietly smoking, waiting till it was time to haul it in, the elder man had been suddenly attacked by Sulgrave with a sheath knife, which he had hidden somewhere about his person. But for the younger man's alertness, there was no doubt that Gribble would have been stabbed fatally. A blow of the younger man's huge fist felled Sulgrave senseless to the bottom of the boat. When he came to himself, if such a phrase may be applied to him, it was as a raving lunatic. In less than a year he died in an asylum without having ever regained his reason.

The origin of the fire remained a mystery. The Gribbles were utterly unable to account for it. But in everybody's mind there lurked a dark suspicion that, taking into account the state of Sulgrave's mind, and the fact that he had drugged Eveline's coffee, as also that he took the key of the Tower with him in the yawl, he and he alone was responsible for it. But of a man so stricken what could be said? They all felt that it was best to say nothing.

It was by means of a fictitious message from her uncle that Sulgrave had induced Evie to accompany him in the yawl.

What he told her was, that Dr. Penrose, on his way from London to Trewella, had gone round by a certain town about a score of miles off, in order to call upon an old friend whom he had not seen for several years, and that, while out driving, he had been thrown, and had broken his arm. He—the man then addressing her—had been sent by her

uncle to fetch her, in order that she might nurse him. He had been fortunate in finding her without having had to go as far as Trewella. No doubt she would return with him there and then, and he would send one of his men to Elderbank to inform Miss Penrose of all that had happened.

Seeing the girl's hesitation, he produced a scrap of paper on which were scrawled a few words, purporting to have been written with the doctor's left hand. "Dear Eveline, I have met with a bad accident. Come to me at once.—Your uncle."

Then Evie hesitated no longer. Not till it was too late did she pause to ask herself how it happened that the smooth-spoken gentleman with the gold-laced cap seemed to know so well who she was, while to her he was an utter stranger. Of what befell her afterwards it is enough to say that beyond being confined to the two rooms in the Tower, she had nothing much to complain of. The serving-woman took her her meals, and waited on her after her rough country fashion, but was wholly impervious to each and every question on Evie's part.

Of the means adopted by Sulgrave to discover the place where Penrose had bestowed Eveline, no information was ever forthcoming. The probability is that he set private detectives to watch the doctor's comings and goings, and as the latter at that time was frequently at Hampstead, besides taking Eveline more than once with him to the lawyer's, there would be little difficulty in tracing the girl to her temporary abode in the London suburb, and thence to Trewella, when the time came for her and Miss Penrose to go back home.

And now but little more remains to be told.

There was no one to oppose the coming of Miss Sulgrave into the property which had *de facto* been hers all along, and equally there was no one to oppose her marrying the man of her choice, whom Dr. Penrose had no longer any occasion to stigmatise as a fortune-hunter.

To Eveline the doctor and Miss Penrose will remain her uncle and aunt to the end of their days.

As the doctor had predicted, the marriage of Guy Sulgrave with the Lady Mary Langmere never came to pass. Guy, who had never been *entêtée* with the young lady, took the matter very philosophically. A little later he went out to one of the Western States of America, where he became the owner of a large cattle ranch, the purchase money for which was found him by his cousin Eveline.

Although Gilmour had married a rich wife, he was too much in love with his profession to give it up; in point of fact, he continued to work as hard at it as ever he had done. He took Tony Scarbin into his studio, where he made himself useful in a score of different ways. Tony used to sketch to the life nearly everybody who called on his master, but there his artistic faculty began and ended. We may be sure that Barney Groome was not forgotten by either Gilmour or his wife.

THE JOURNEY'S END.

WHICH would you choose—if you could choose
The way to enter your final rest?
What is the pathway you would use—
Which is the door would please you best?

Would you go out of life with a rush,
Knowing nothing of how or when,
With a gleam of the sun, and the song of the thrush,
The last thing caught from the world of men?

Would you lie down on a bed of pain,
And fight for a scanty measure of breath,
'Till the merciful languor lulled heart and brain,
And the stupor of life was merged in death?

Would you die to the sound of a nation's cheers,
With the swift sharp pang of an enemy's ball;
Or wear out the length of the weary years,
Till life holds nothing, and death holds all?

Would you pass in sleep as a little child,
That breathes out its soul on its mother's knee?
But the children are holy and undefiled,
And sorrowful world-worn men are we.

Would you meet with the angel face to face,
And scan the journey that lies before,
As a traveller taketh heart of grace
When he steers his bark for an unknown shore?

What does it matter! at set of sun,
In the sweet spring dawn or when midnight fall,
So long as the work of the day be done,
And the worker ready to hear the call?

Painless or pained, or swift or slow,
Early or late, whate'er betide,
I shall not trouble which way I go,
If the Shepherd of men walks by my side.

Yea, when that voice sounds loud and sweet
I shall stretch out my hands and cry to Him,
That the love which has guarded my toiling feet,
May hold me fast in the valley dim.

How can I choose which way is best?
Endeth alike both calm and strife;
For all roads lead to the City of Rest,
And beyond the River of Death lies Life.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

AP
4
A7
v.56

The Argosy

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY